

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, December 7, 1999** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 99/12/07

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, we confidently ask for Your strength and encouragement in our service of You through our service of others. We ask for Your gift of wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Today, hon. members, we provide happy birthday greetings to the distinguished Member for Calgary-Fort, who was born on December 7.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present an SOS petition signed by 120 concerned citizens from Edmonton. They are asking the government to increase support for “public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.”

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition from the SOS committee, some 113 Edmontonians, that urges this

Government to increase funding of children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

Thank you, sir.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask your permission to present a petition signed by 119 Albertans, and this is urging

the Government of Alberta to conduct an independent public inquiry of the Workers' Compensation Act, including an examination of the operations of the WCB, the Appeals Commission, and the criteria for appointments to the Board.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to file on behalf of 102 Edmontonians petitioning “the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to increase funding of children in public and separate schools.”

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table a petition containing 87 names from the areas of Edmonton, Whitecourt, St. Albert, Fort Saskatchewan, Morinville, Athabasca, and Sherwood Park urging

the Legislative Assembly to provide all families with safe, afford-

able, quality Out of School Care whenever it is needed by providing adequate funding for children zero to twelve (0-12) years [of age].

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, thank you. May the petition that I introduced last Thursday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care may be maintained.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. With permission I'd request that the SOS petition I presented recently now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to increase support for children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the ACTISEC petition on tuition freezes I presented last week now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, urge the Legislative Assembly to freeze tuition and institutional fees and increase support in the foundation of post-secondary education.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I ask that the SOS petition tabled yesterday in this House be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to increase support for children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I request that the petition I presented yesterday regarding a full public inquiry into the operations of the WCB now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to conduct an independent public inquiry of the Workers' Compensation Act, including an examination of the operations of the WCB, the Appeals Commission, and the criteria for appointments to the Board.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I'm giving notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions and motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I have a number of tablings today that I'll do very quickly for you: first of all, five copies of our response to the Auditor General; also, five copies each of the annual report for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation, Alberta Securities Commission, and Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research; five copies of an item just released today from Standard and Poor's, one of the most respected rating agencies in the world, reaffirming our rating, a double A plus, and the A1 plus for short-term rating.

In their words: a decade ago – and they're referring to oil prices last year – “oil prices that averaged near the US\$13.73 per barrel,” which Alberta “experienced in 1998-1999 would have certainly resulted in severe revenue weakness.” The release went on to say:

Thanks to its well-established prudent budget management, which makes allowance for the inevitable variability of its revenue forecast, Alberta delivered its fifth straight overall surplus.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table five copies of a document called Backgrounder: Partnerships with Non-profit and Private Health Service Providers. This was prepared by the Calgary regional health authority, and it speaks to

- Facts about Service Providers
- Increased Access for Patients
- Increased Convenience for Patients
- Effective Use of Resources
- Surgical and Medical Services

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a news story from today's *New York Times* which describes how the economic boom in North America, driven by globalization, is throwing tens of thousands of people in U.S. cities into homelessness and desperate poverty. The title of this story is *Cities Try to Sweep Homeless Out of Sight*.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, two tablings today. One is from the president of the Friends of Medicare. It's a letter to editors of newspapers around the province indicating why the Friends of Medicare are so opposed to for-profit hospitals.

The next one, Mr. Speaker, is quite amusing. This man, Bob Oldham from Stony Plain, phoned up and wanted his comments recorded exactly on a piece of paper and filed in the Assembly. So I'm doing that for Mr. Oldham. He, too, is opposed to for-profit hospitals.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling the

appropriate number of copies of the *Labour News*, Alberta's alternative news voice. The reason why I'm doing this is that a constituent of mine has written an article in this paper, and it deals with the death of another constituent of mine that they believe died as a result of the daily exposure to solvents that he ingested while he was working as a caretaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two sets of tablings. The first tabling is three letters from Albertans requesting protection of Alberta's foothills natural region. These people have been in correspondence with both the Premier and the minister of environmental protection.

The second tabling is from three Albertans who are requesting protection of Bighorn country. In addition, these people have been in correspondence with the Minister of Environment and so far have got no satisfaction.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have but one tabling this afternoon, and it's copies of the submission from the Consumers' Association of Canada dated December 2, 1999, indicating their concerns with Bill 40, the Health Information Act.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a report, the final submission request from 38 Albertans requesting funding for midwifery.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table five copies of letters from Albertans who have experienced hardships due to workplace injuries to their loved ones. They were exposed to these hardships because the WCB did not adjudicate their claims in a prompt fashion but took years to do so.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table the summary of injury-related deaths and hospitalizations to children, 1997, summarized by the Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research.

Also, copies of my letter to the Minister of Community Development with respect to seniors' concerns surrounding increasing rental rates in the province and his response.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 44 bright and energetic grade 6 students from Brander Gardens elementary school in the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They are accompanied today by their teachers, Mrs. Natalie Gago-

Esteves and Reva Robillard-Martin. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd request that they please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you today and through you to the members of the Assembly a friend of mine, Mrs. Linda McIntosh. Linda is the former minister of education and minister of environment for the province of Manitoba, and I'd like her to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 55 students from Sir Alexander Mackenzie school. They are here today with their teachers, Ms Cheryl Cariou and Mrs. Janet Hurley, and assistants Mrs. Annalee Woollam and Ms Jackie Achen. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I have great pleasure in introducing to you and through you to members of this Assembly four guests seated in the members' gallery. In September of this year I had the privilege of leading a 14-member oil and gas delegation to India. One of the Alberta-based companies was O'Connor Associates, an environmental engineering consulting firm. O'Connor Associates was able to enter into an agreement with Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd., a Fortune 500 company and the largest oil and gas company of India.

Present today in the members' gallery are two senior members of the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd. of India. We have with us the group general manager, Mr. Vijay Jain, and the chief chemist, Mr. R. Vijayaranean, both of whom are affiliated with the Institute of Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management of Oil and Natural Gas Corporation of India. Accompanying them is Mr. Bruce MacEachern of O'Connor Associates and Mr. Greg Jardine, director, emerging markets, Economic Development, responsible for India. Mr. Speaker, I request that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature a friend of the city of Edmonton, of the province, of mine, and of many members on both sides of the House, Bruce Campbell. Bruce grew up in Cadomin, Alberta. A longtime resident and business owner in Edmonton, a city alderman and councillor from 1986 to 1995, Bruce is up in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd like him to stand and be recognized by the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'm pleased to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Mr. Prem Kalia. Prem Kalia is currently the president of the Mahatma Gandhi Canadian Foundation for World Peace located in Edmonton. He's seated in the public

gallery. I'd ask him to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you four prominent members of the Edmonton Indo-Canadian community. They are directors of the Sahaara, a community service organization in Mill Woods. About Mill Woods I must say that it's a model community known for its harmony, understanding, and co-operation across interfaith and intergrowth communities. The term sahaara in many South Asian languages literally means support or service.

The four directors who are seated in the public gallery are Mr. Harchand Grewal, who taught at the high school in Sylvan Lake all of his life and now is a businessman in Edmonton; Mrs. Shashi Kalia, who is a member of the Capital regional child and family services in this area and is a former director of the district office of social services in St. Paul; Mr. Charan Khehra, a former senior economist with the department of labour of the province of Alberta; and Mrs. Lalita Koodoo, who was executive assistant to the director of the U of A archives and collections at the local university.

I'd ask all of them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Information Act

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. There are few things more important to Albertans than the protection of their property and their privacy. My questions today are to the Premier. Is it the government's intention to invoke closure to cut off debate on the Health Information Act, a bill that will in fact take away privacy rights from every man, woman, and child in Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the bill will do exactly the opposite. It will protect privacy. Notice of motion was served last Thursday relative to closure. It's entirely up to the opposition. It's in their hands.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess the question is that we would in fact pull the bill.

Why does this government dismiss out of hand the concerns that have been expressed not only by people of the province through the elected Official Opposition but by the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, the Alberta Medical Association, the Alberta College of Family Physicians, the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, and the Health Sciences Association of Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's all a matter of balance. You know, we have the Council of Chairs of the regional health authorities in support, Calgary RHA, Chinook RHA, Dr. Paul Greenwood, a member of the steering committee, the Alberta Cancer Board, the Information and Privacy Commissioner. The list goes on and on. They have their list. We have our list. You know, it's a matter of striking the right balance, and we've been very successful at that.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, how can he ignore the Calgary Chamber of Commerce?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, how can this hon. member ignore the Council of Chairs of the regional health authorities?

THE SPEAKER: Aah, methinks there's a bit of debate going on in here. This is question period.

1:50 Regional Health Authority Contracts

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, on the radio on Saturday the Premier said, and I quote: to hold health authorities accountable, we will make the contracts public. Yesterday in referring to making these hidden contracts public, the Premier said, "There is no legislated authority at this particular time." Why does this Premier have one message on his radio show and another message for this Legislature?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, what we have here is a case of selective listening. I was referring to the legislation that is proposed relative to health care reforms next spring. Right now the legislation covering any information that can be released by regional health authorities is covered under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, if contracting out is so economical, in the words of this Premier, then why does the Calgary regional health authority, which is certainly the region that's made greatest use of contracting out, also have a \$52 million deficit?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't think the deficit is quite as large now, since we put – what is it? – about 200 and some odd million dollars back into the health care system.

But let's get it on the table. The hon. member knows full well that public/private partnerships can work. It was going on when she was minister of health. When she was minister of health, there were 30 nonhospital surgical centres accredited at that time, including the Gimbel eye clinic and the Morgentaler abortion clinic, and they were charging facility fees. She had no problem with the concept of private clinics then, and she had no problem with facility fees. Then she stood up in this Legislature and said:

The private sector does in fact have a role if it can prove that it is efficient, that it's operating fairly, and that it's meeting the responsibility of our health sector to provide access to health services.

That was in *Hansard*, July 2, 1992.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I'll compare my record as health minister against this Premier and this government any time he wants to debate it.

Mr. Speaker, when we come to the issue of contracting out, the issue is not – the issue is not – whether or not the contract should exist with respect to short-stay services; the issue is this government's not making the contracts public. This is what we get: blank pages. When will those contracts be made public?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if the opposition supports the legislation, there will be wording in the legislation that will make sure that those contracts are open and transparent.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Private Health Services

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just as Quebec's Premier Lucien Bouchard is moving slowly, patiently, and methodically to dismantle Canada, this Premier is moving slowly, patiently, and

methodically to dismantle Canada's public health care. I don't know which is more insidious, because Canada's public health system is one of the unifying, universal programs that brings us together as Canadians, and it demonstrates the compassion that differentiates us from the U.S. My questions are to the Premier. Why is this Premier debasing and undermining the one single public program that unifies all Canadians?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to stand up once again and publicly support without question the health system as we know it today, the health system that is governed by the principles of the Canada Health Act: universality, public administration, comprehensiveness, accessibility, and portability. We agree as a caucus without question, unwaveringly, to those principles. That's what it's all about.

MS OLSEN: Well, the devil's in the detail, and we don't have the detail.

Does the Premier not realize that as soon as the first contract to a private hospital is signed, he has doomed medicare across this country? Does he not understand the equal treatment provisions of NAFTA?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the question of NAFTA and how our proposal relates to NAFTA has been put to the federal government. As I understand now, our officials are discussing that component of the proposed legislation along with other components as we speak.

MS OLSEN: My final question is to the Premier as well. Given that representatives of the Alberta and Ontario government and the federal Reform opposition are working together with an American political consulting company, is this Premier bringing his two-tiered medical system in alone or is he co-ordinating his efforts with Mr. Harris and Mr. Manning?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker, I am not. I have no idea what Mr. Manning is up to, and I have no idea what Mr. Harris is up to. Well, I know what Mr. Harris is up to. He's taken about 450 or 460 pages out of our book, and relative to his economic reforms he's turning Ontario around. You know, he's a few years behind. I don't think he'll ever reach a double A plus credit rating and receive the glowing report from Standard and Poor's that we received today, but he's trying. He's trying hard, and he's following the Alberta example.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you, the Premier's TV acting job last night I don't think is going to earn him any Gemini awards. [interjections] Ah, yeah. On *The National*. It's not going to win you any Gemini awards unless it's in the category of comedy, I suppose. It was amusing to watch the Premier stubbornly defend his government's orientation to promote private, for-profit hospitals. So I'd like to ask the Premier: why it is that he's so insistent to appease a few Calgary investors and waste taxpayers' time and money to facilitate the development of private, for-profit hospitals? What's the other agenda?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this has absolutely nothing to do with any investors, whether they're from Calgary or Edmonton or Thorhild or Red Deer or Grande Prairie or Medicine Hat or Brooks. This has something to do with alleviating suffering and finding new and better and more effective and more efficient ways of doing things. That's what it's all about.

MS BARRETT: So is the Premier saying that HRG isn't suing me over defamation because I keep defending public health care and that they haven't come to that government looking for overnight licensing rights? Tell me.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can't comment on a court case that is between the hon. member and a private company.

MS BARRETT: Well, it's not a court case. It's a gag order right now, Mr. Speaker.

In the meantime, will the Premier admit . . . [interjections] What's that? Should I sit down and listen to the jokes or something?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader of the third party, let's get on to the question. I'm telling you about, you know, performances.

MS BARRETT: Honest, I was trying. I just couldn't hear.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier please admit now that the reason that he and this government closed three Calgary hospitals was to increase demand in Calgary for for-profit hospitals?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: No. Mr. Speaker, if it's a gag order, it certainly isn't working very well.

First of all, there weren't three closed. There were two closed, and one was moved to another site and is operating quite well. I'm talking about the Grace hospital for women. It's operating on a different site. It's operating on the site of the existing Foothills hospital. [interjections] Yes, one hospital was closed down, and another was completely demolished. That was done so we could open up new state-of-the-art beds in other facilities in publicly funded hospitals.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Historic Sites

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are on the front step of a new millennium and only a few more steps to the centennial anniversary of our province. Looking back, as Albertans we are proud of our history, and we need to strengthen it as the launching pad for our future. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. In our Calgary-Fort constituency there are a number of sites and buildings that have a long history, and there is concern from my constituents regarding their historical preservation. Could the minister update Albertans on the policy, the process of historical site preservation?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province has two designations that can be issued to protect historically significant sites. The first one is the provincial historic resource designation, which is the highest degree of legislated protection, and it prohibits any kind of alterations on the site without the written permission of the minister. The other designation is the registered historic resource, and this has a mechanism in place whereby 90-days' notice has to be given to the department so they can review what alterations would be done to the site and to get approval in that route.

To determine a designation of sites, they're assessed in several areas including historical interest, architectural interest, community support, owner support, and end use. I'd also like to point out that all municipalities have the authority to designate historic sites in addition to the province.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is also to the same minister. A few thousand Calgarians signed a petition to request that the government designate the Lougheed Building in Calgary downtown as an historical site. The request was denied. Why can't the government just simply satisfy the request from a citizen group to designate a site historical?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Mr. Speaker, I won't diminish the importance of the Lougheed Building or of the Grand Theatre, which used to exist in it, or of the significance of the building to Calgarians in general. The department is responsible for provincial designations, and it was deemed after a very careful and stringent review that as we evaluated it, it was not of provincial significance. I would like to again reiterate that if this building is of that great a significance, the city of Calgary has the authority to designate.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In other parts of our world we have thousands of years of historical sites, but in Alberta could the minister update Albertans on the number of sites and public dollars supporting historical preservation in Alberta?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: There are a total of 413 sites currently designated in the province, 73 of which are in Calgary. Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, during the past three years 27 sites in Calgary have been eligible for some \$643,000 worth of support, 111 sites in the rest of the province for \$1.2 million worth, bringing a total of 1 and three-quarter million dollars directed directly at historic sites in the past three years.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Provincial/Municipal Charter

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the October 1999 AUMA convention a resolution requesting that the government of Alberta recognize the independence, responsibility, and accountability of local government through establishment of a provincial/municipal charter was unanimously endorsed by the delegates, yet back on March 2, 1999, in this Legislative Assembly the Premier dismissed the need for a provincial/municipal charter. This is symptomatic of this government's disrespect for school boards, regional health authorities, and local governments. My questions today are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Why is this government opposed to the establishment of a formal provincial/municipal charter that would recognize the independence, responsibility, and accountability of local governments when it was endorsed by the AUMA?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, we've said many times and will continue to say many times that the municipalities are the building blocks of this province. Strong municipalities ultimately lead to a strong province. It's to everyone's benefit to have strong municipalities.

We work as partners. We work in partnership. It's historically been the process that this government has worked with, and we will continue to work as partners in this province to find ways of providing service to the common constituents that we have. Whether it be municipal governance or provincial governance, the constituents are the same. So, indeed, we are very prepared to work with whatever groups to see that through partnerships we can provide the best possible service for our constituents in this province.

MR. GIBBONS: I hope this isn't a continuation of snubbing the municipalities.

Will the Minister of Municipal Affairs listen to the local government to make a commitment to consider the unanimous recommendation of the AUMA to establish a provincial/municipal charter?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, this past summer we engaged in a very strenuous two weeks where we traveled throughout the entire province to meet with all of the municipalities who chose to. As a matter of fact, through that process we met with 85 percent of the rural municipalities in the province and the major portion of the urban municipalities in the province.

We are prepared to listen. We are prepared to work with the municipalities, and just as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, came about the program that my colleague responsible for infrastructure brought forward, a very significant program that dealt with the needs that were identified by those municipalities during those discussions. The committee that dealt with the education tax came forward with an interim resolution of the huge challenges that were being faced by the municipalities. Further to that, we'll be dealing with the legislation coming forward this fall to deal with the third tax exemptions that the municipalities want.

Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with partnership arrangements, how best to serve as partners. To suggest that we're snubbing the municipalities is not a just statement whatsoever.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Minister, the municipal leaders are wondering whether this is not another case of the government misreading the views of Alberta.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, if partnering with municipalities is misreading the wishes of the municipalities, I didn't get that. In discussions with the . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Where is the charter?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The question is: where is the charter? The charter is something that would have to be changed through the Constitution of this country. It's not just a matter of Alberta and the municipalities working together. The charter is embedded in the Constitution and would ultimately require a constitutional change. It's unfortunate that they don't study the process to have a better and firmer understanding of the significance of what is being asked for.

We're very prepared to work with the municipalities, we're very prepared to partner with the municipalities, and we're doing that on a regular basis.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Oil Sands Development

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Development in northern Alberta, such as in my constituency in Fort McMurray, is very important, especially with the rich resource that it has. In fact, that's why we call it the oil sands capital of the world. The government policy, however, on oil sands and the new fiscal regime was intended to have the market drive investment in northern Alberta and, for that matter, in all of Alberta. My question today is to the Minister of Resource Development. Is this policy working? If it is, what examples, and what makes this different than 20 years ago?

2:10

DR. WEST: Well, Mr. Speaker, 20 years ago on a day such as today when Shell Canada and Chevron and Western Oil Sands announced a \$3.8 billion oil sands project, you'd have had 20 politicians standing on the podium making the announcement and the news release; today, totally private sector. The policy that changed in this province was that government got out of the business of being in business. In fact, we sold shares that we had in the oil sands. We got rid of an M and E tax. We put in an oil sands royalty regime that's working. We put in a good regulatory regime. We have people that are well educated and have a work ethic.

I talked to Shell Canada, and when they took this to their board of directors' meeting in Europe last week, they said that the tax regime in Alberta along with the labour laws and the future that exists here as far as 300 billion barrels of oil in oil sands is why they made this decision. This project alone, along with the other \$30 billion that's going into the oil sands, will return about \$5 billion in royalties and taxes to the province of Alberta over the next 30 years. It creates a thousand permanent jobs, 4,000 in construction, and on top of it, it brings in with ATCO Energy company, a company based in Alberta, a cogeneration project that will produce another 170 megawatts. The ongoing story of progress in the province of Alberta.

I would just add as I close on this part of the question that the Parkland Institute, who made reference to the royalty system and reference to the oil sands, should perhaps start looking at Alberta for the facts and figures instead of going to Norway.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Government Reorganization Secretariat

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister responsible for the Government Reorganization Secretariat is moving to cut more jobs. The 11th floor of the Legislature Annex is being renovated to accommodate the directors who will be contracting out current employees' jobs. My questions are to the minister responsible. Will the minister release all cost-benefit analyses before a single job is outsourced?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, we're in the process at the present time with private-sector consultants of doing exactly that. As we go forward with every department and every area, whether it's admin support or human resources, we will be making that information available to the managers in those areas. I imagine that that information is not something that's cloaked in any secrecy. So the answer to the question in the broadest statement is yes.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would the minister please table those analyses in the Legislature?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the commitment I can make is that as we get down the road on the changes that the secretariat and the shared services model will be using, I'll certainly bring forth the results of that and table them in the House.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would the minister table those in the House before one job is lost so that families know where they stand and how many jobs are cut?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, it's not about job loss at all. We have made a commitment to the people who work for the province of Alberta in these areas that we will do everything in our power, if

their jobs are upset, to retrain or redirect them within government, and as we outsource and look at contracts, we will be packaging those jobs to go with them to the private sector. This is not a cost-cutting or a job count basis process. This one is to make an efficient government, something that we stand for.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Forest Management

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Furthering the Alberta advantage in Alberta is the important focus of our government. My question today is to the Associate Minister of Forestry. What role will your department play in supporting Alberta's forest industry?

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The forestry sector, of course, plays a very important role in the overall diversification plan of Alberta. Next to the oil and gas industry and agriculture, forestry creates the most jobs and most income for our province. As the Associate Minister of Forestry I'll be the advocate in the industry in policy development, diversification, and revenue generation.

The forestry industry itself creates over 25,000 jobs directly in that industry.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. CARDINAL: Twenty-five thousand and an additional 27,000 jobs indirectly, so it's good news for the Liberals because a lot of those jobs are in Edmonton.

Basically when you look at direct revenues of over \$4 billion and total indirect and induced revenues of \$8.4 billion, it's good news for Alberta.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same associate minister. Forestry is one of Alberta's most important renewable resources that provides benefit for our society. What will the associate minister do to ensure that there is not an overallocation of timber?

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a very good question, because a lot of people in Alberta are concerned about the allocation and the possible overallocation of timber resources. Forestry a long time ago adopted a sustained management policy, which means that you never, never allocate more timber than you can grow each year in the area. So it is a good policy. In fact, the inventory volume today in forestry, both deciduous and coniferous, is over 44,000.5 million cubic metres, but the important part is that only 23.8 is allocated annually, so we are definitely managing our forests properly.

In addition to that, there is local involvement, Mr. Speaker. We operate on quadrants, which is a five-year plan of how your forest will be harvested. Each year companies have to file these plans, the community looks at these plans, and our government does the final approval. So we have a handle on how our forests are managed.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is also to the same associate minister. What will the associate minister do to ensure that there is value added to our forest development?

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That

is a very important question. When you look at the overall economic diversification of our province, I think Alberta has done very well in the last 10 years in diversifying our economy. Our next step in certain sectors, of course, is the continuing of our diversification plan in the value-adding area.

Mr. Speaker, just recently we allocated some deciduous through a public process, and two companies were successful in the bid. One is Ainsworth in Grande Prairie, and we'll be putting a project in Grande Prairie and also another one in Valleyview, where they face reasonably high unemployment. The other project is called ABCOR. Part of the project will be in my constituency in Wabasca, which has a very high unemployment rate. The other project is in Conklin-Janvier, again, a very high unemployment area, and the next one is in Prosvita, very high unemployment, 80 to 90 percent in some cases.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

School Construction

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton's two southeast Francophone schools, l'école Ste-Jeanne-d'Arc and l'école Maurice Lavallee, are like many other schools across the province: overcrowded. Enrollment at the two schools has steadily increased since 1994, and the current space utilization formula is outdated. My first question this afternoon is to the Minister of Learning. Does this minister agree that the space utilization formula has failed these Francophone students?

2:20

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, seeing that the space utilization formula is presently under the Minister of Infrastructure, I'd be more than happy to take that question to the Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that grades 4 through 12 in the Francophone community in this end of the city are located at the Maurice Lavallee school, when are you planning to proceed with construction of an elementary Francophone school in east Edmonton? When are you going to do this? It's under your jurisdiction. You can't pass the buck.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's very unfortunate that the hon. member did not read the press release of May 26, when the cabinet shuffle occurred. This is garbage, what they're saying, what they're speaking over there.

MRS. SOETAERT: You don't know?

DR. OBERG: Speaking of don't know. You know nothing about this. All you have to do is read the press release that went out. Mr. Speaker, the construction of schools is under the Minister of Infrastructure. Again, I will not answer on behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure, but he is more than welcome to answer to his purview.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have my third question also to the Minister of Learning. Will the minister try to implement the 24th recommendation of the School Facilities Task Force, and that is to revise the method of determining capacity and space utilization in not only the schools in southeast Edmonton in whatever board they're in but across the province?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Seniors' Property Taxes

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors in my communities in Calgary, particularly those on fixed incomes, ask me why our government is not taking steps to provide relief for these seniors relative to education property taxes, particularly when their property taxes have increased. They say this pointing to the fact that government has regularly of late made many spending announcements whereby big dollars are being put back into other government programs. My question this afternoon is to the Minister of Community Development. Is the minister prepared at this time to provide some tax relief for fixed-income seniors, such as the former property tax reduction program, to alleviate financial hardship relative to education property taxes?

MR. WOLOSZYN: Mr. Speaker, in 1994 the province made a very conscious decision to assist seniors with the greatest need, and to that end the Alberta seniors' benefit program was created. That took over something called the Alberta assured income plan, which provided income-tested supplements; the property tax reduction program, which provided a tax credit to all seniors living in their own homes; senior citizens' renter assistance program, which provided a grant to all seniors living in rented accommodations; and also eliminated the health care premium waiver. That then was put into a program to help seniors whose income was below a particular threshold. That threshold for couples is at \$27,385, the highest in the country.

At this point in time we are looking at all alternatives, and certainly we would look at that, but at the moment I cannot give you a commitment that it will happen.

MS GRAHAM: Mr. Speaker, further to that undertaking by the minister I'm wondering if the minister, being that he is responsible for seniors, is prepared to relay to cabinet the call of many property tax payers to remove education property taxes from property tax and fund education through general revenues?

MR. WOLOSZYN: The issue as brought up and identified by the hon. member with respect to seniors has certainly been brought to my attention. Also, in my travels with the Minister of Municipal Affairs that whole area of education property tax was raised with the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I believe that at some point in time there will be a broader discussion by this government of the implications of that program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Special Waste Treatment Centre

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 8, 1999, Bovar reported that revenues from the Swan Hills waste treatment centre declined in the third quarter as compared to this same period the previous year. My questions are for the Provincial Treasurer. Will the Treasurer confirm that taxpayers will receive no net income in 1999 from the profit-sharing arrangement in the Swan Hills waste treatment centre?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I think it's a bit premature to be able to give a definitive answer on that. We won't know for sure for another couple of months and even after that, until all operations reports have come in. So I can't say right now.

MR. SAPERS: Will the Treasurer explain to all of the taxpayers of this province, who've sunk \$441 million into the Swan Hills waste treatment plant . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: How much?

MR. SAPERS: Four hundred and forty-one million dollars. . . . that the total return on their investment through 1999 will be just \$23,600, or, if you want to be precise, .00053 percent.

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we don't have the final numbers in. I'll take the member's word that he's run the numbers up until today, but we don't have those final numbers in. We'll certainly give a report when we have those, but I don't want to say for sure what it's going to be when we actually don't have the final reports in yet for year-end.

MR. SAPERS: Given that the intent of the profit-sharing agreement was to generate a return on the taxpayers \$441 million investment, an amount about equal to the operating budget of the Edmonton public school board, by the way, why are Albertans eligible to share only 10 percent of the profits in the years 2000 and 2001 when they were eligible to share 30 percent in 1997?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, again, we don't have final numbers in. I'll take the member's word for it that he's running some hypothetical numbers based on information that we have to date. I don't have a problem with that. We will give a full report of what the final numbers are.

One thing that should be kept in mind in terms of a return to all Albertans is the fact that the environment has been demonstrably improved because of the operations that go on there, and I think – I could be corrected on this – that this is still the only facility of its type in Canada, so that is the greatest return right there.

The actual numbers we'll get out at year-end, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Developmental Disabilities

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Persons with developmental disabilities have a variety of very special needs that require community supports, employment supports, social supports, and, of course, personal supports. Calls and letters to my office in Calgary-West indicate that there is a lot of support for the Alberta government to continue providing these PDD programs and services which help those in need. However, since capital and research projects tend to fall outside the mandate of the PDD community boards, I have some questions in this regard about the role of the PDD Foundation. My first question is to the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the minister explain to my constituents the precise function and purpose of the PDD Foundation in relation to helping persons with disabilities?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the member does raise an important issue, one that has frequently surfaced during the review that I've conducted across the province. I want to inform the hon. member, her constituents, and many others who are concerned about programs for persons with developmental disabilities that when the PDD Foundation was established over a year ago, it was created to enhance programs and services in aid of persons with developmental disabilities. Specifically, the PDD Foundation is

mandated to undertake, support, and promote activities that enhance the quality of life for adults in this province who have a developmental disability. The foundation has received an endowment to help accomplish that purpose.

2:30

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. My first supplementary is also to the same Associate Minister of Health and Wellness. What has the PDD Foundation accomplished on behalf of persons with developmental disabilities since it was created?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, in a nutshell the PDD Foundation is now up and running. They've established an office. They've engaged some very competent staff. They've conducted and are conducting further consultations throughout the province with respect to their mandate, and, in fact, I think they just announced round 1 of their very first grant application process, which will see approximately \$100,000 flow out to the PDD community who are successful in an application that supports a capital project or a pilot project or a research project.

Mr. Speaker, during the review that I've just done and with all the letters that have flowed in from individuals concerned about this, I can tell you that there are groups near to the hon. member's area, such as the Accessible Housing Society of Calgary, such as The Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute, who are very concerned about the outcome of the deliberations respecting the future of this foundation, which does provide an important role.

MS KRYCZKA: My second supplementary is also to the same minister. What assurances can the minister give to those groups and individuals who are concerned that the PDD Foundation may be competing with them in their fund-raising efforts at the community level?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, that's a very good question, Mr. Speaker. Let me say at the outset that when the government of Alberta created this foundation, it was never the intention that the foundation would be seen to be or perceived to be in competition with anyone at the community level for precious dollars. The foundation, quite frankly, was created to receive an endowment from the government of Alberta. So far they've received \$2.5 million toward their purposes, but they also have the ability as a foundation to attract larger dollars from some large corporations and perhaps from some large individual donors, perhaps for tax receipt purposes or whatever, and then see those moneys doled out in large amounts for eligible projects. I would say that part of their function and part of their purpose will in fact be accomplished dependent on the size of the endowment and the endowment fund as we see it grow in their hands.

In any event, I'll tell the hon. member and all those who are interested that this particular issue will be addressed more fully and more conclusively in my forthcoming report in a few weeks.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Gaming

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of the newly created Ministry of Gaming. Financial projections show tremendous increases in slot machine revenues, millions and millions of dollars more. Interest is being expressed by existing casino operators in hundreds more machines. To the minister: why is the minister just sitting back and allowing this industry to mushroom out of control?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, the industry is not mushrooming out of control. In fact, the contribution to overall revenues in the province of Alberta has diminished as a percentage of what gaming contributes to the overall percentage. Yes, there is an increase in slot machines. About 3,528 are in destination casinos throughout the province.

Also, any type of expansion that is undertaken is always done through a municipal planning process. It includes ample discussion at the town council level.

So it's business as usual. We're not sitting back. We're carefully watching this situation, and we really see the change in revenues in this province as being a function of the good work of the people in the energy industry and the resource development industry.

MR. WICKMAN: To the same minister: why won't this minister cap the number of slot machines as the VLTs are presently capped?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, there has never been a discussion on whether there is a need to cap. This is the first time that this member has brought it up. We've had previous open and public consultation with the Canadian Foundation on Compulsive Gambling. They've been to a standing policy committee meeting. They've talked about the use of slot machines, which pay out at about 82 percent, as opposed to VLTs, which pay out at 69.76 percent. We've seen plebiscites throughout the province in previous years. We're basically at a position with the market dynamic that indicates that there is a marketplace for slot machines in destination casinos at this stage.

We see that some parts of the gaming industry in Alberta are growing, but we also see, Mr. Speaker, where there's renewed interest in looking at the addiction side of it with the creation of the research institute at the University of Calgary, a terrific university, where 1 and a half million dollars times three years for a total of 4 and a half million dollars is to be spent directly on research. It not only talks about addiction but also talks about socioeconomic impact. Maybe they'll answer that question. Maybe they'll answer the question: should there be so many designated slot machines in the province of Alberta? What does it do for economic impact? Does it create an artificial asset? What are the economic parameters in which we look at gaming today?

So, Mr. Speaker, I think the member has brought up some darn fine points, and I think there are areas where we can use those in further discussion about the gaming industry in general in Alberta. [interjections] I know they want to hear more, because I hear their clamouring in support, but I'll talk individually with the member if he has further discussion points.

Thank you.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: will this government's need for greed never end?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, we feel that there is not a need for greed. In fact, we feel that there is a very good management process presently in place for recognizing the issues of gaming as an entertainment industry in this province. We recognize that this province has hit these issues head-on with the formation of a ministry. We want to hit these problems and we want to hit these opportunities head-on. That's why we'll continue this debate. We'll continue it not only in this Legislative Assembly but through the good standing policy committee process, public consultation with stakeholders throughout the province.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, today we had 14 sets of questions, which is very good. So thank you very much for assisting the chair in ensuring that all private members do have an opportunity.

Now, hon. members, I'm going to make a rather unique request of you. There's a situation that has transpired here this afternoon where we might need to revert to another point in the Order Paper Routine. To do that, we would need unanimous consent.

The request to you is to give unanimous consent to revert to Notices of Motions. All in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: Okay.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Thirty seconds from now we'll call on two hon. members to participate in Members' Statements. We'll go in this order: first of all, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. If any other member would like to make a member's statement, please advise me in a note within the next number of seconds.

2:40 Calgary School Trustees Election

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about the school system in Calgary. The education system, especially for the young, is very important. As we are closing this century to get into a new millennium, changes in the education system and the stakeholder participation will become exciting challenges for all of us.

To me, teaching and learning are two sides of the same valuable coin in the progressive currency of our ever changing society. An example in the recent school trustees election in Calgary, it strikes me, is the number of candidates and the range of skills and experience of the candidates. From young students to social activists, from businesspersons to homemakers they represent the positive, make-it-happen attitude of Albertans. With a community association in the Calgary-Fort constituency I had the opportunity to organize and moderate three public forums for the candidates to be interviewed by the constituents. I'm very pleased to hear that all candidates expressed the same objective, which is to focus on the learners' needs and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the system. The difference is in their approaches. I'm encouraged to have heard words such as financial accountability, flexibility, and innovative approach.

My constituents voiced that it is easy to demand change in other people and other organizations, but it is very difficult to change inside ourselves and our own organizations. However, both internal and external changes are required to advance. I believe there is now a great opportunity for all stakeholder groups to innovate internally and to join in partnership with the government in the journey through the ever changing learning landscapes toward the horizon of an advanced society of Albertans. I believe that all Albertans are in the same boat. Albertans can row in the same direction with everyone at the oars or Albertans can lighten our boat and glide faster by discarding our past baggage in all ways.

As we are closing to the step of the new millennium, I take this opportunity to wish all Albertans – parents, students, teachers, trustees – a joyful holiday, a happy new year, and many blessings.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Energy and Utilities Board

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An increasing number of people are affected by the impacts of oil and gas activity. The Alberta Energy and Utilities Board does its best to resolve conflicts before wells, pipelines, or batteries are built and, where necessary, holds public hearings. I do not doubt that the staff work hard to resolve problems, but due partly to government cutbacks they are short staffed. In spite of their efforts a recent AEUB document states that disputes between residents and petroleum companies appear to be increasing in number and intensity in recent years. We need answers to why this is happening.

Last February in the Legislature the Alberta Liberal leader, Nancy MacBeth, drew attention to the increasing public frustration with the effects of energy developments. The Premier promised her that there would be a new mediation process to help resolve issues. We know that the AEUB is working with the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, the Farmers' Advocate, and other groups to develop an alternative dispute-resolution mechanism. When developed – and this is taking time – it will provide another tool for handling problems, and I wish them success with their efforts. However, according to a letter I have received, this AEUB initiative is only related peripherally to the Premier's comments about the use of alternative dispute-resolution practices within Alberta.

I hope that the Premier will soon be able to clarify what he himself was proposing. Will he provide funding so that the AEUB has the resources to provide fully trained staff to help resolve disputes at an early stage, whether they occur up front or once a well or facility is in operation? Or given the fact that some landowners associate the AEUB with industry interests, as it is now primarily financed by industry, does the Premier have plans for another process? I think many Albertans would like to know, particularly those who are currently in conflict with the AEUB in the Calgary region.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Health Information Act

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, Erskine May in *Parliamentary Practice* talks about the role of opposition. They talk about critics having a task "to direct criticism of the Government's policy and administration and to outline alternative policies." With respect to Bill 40 that's in fact what the opposition has attempted to do.

Since the bill was brought into the Legislative Assembly, the opposition has certainly pointed out shortcomings in the bill. We've acknowledged that the bill is significantly better than Bill 30 that came into the Legislature in the spring of 1997, but more importantly, Mr. Speaker, we've attempted to highlight not only the shortcomings and weaknesses, but we have put forward in the order of 60 changes to the bill, 60 changes that would do a couple of things.

What they would do is allow Albertans a measure of control they don't currently have over when they will give up their personal health information and how it can be used, changes that would ensure, as the health information steering committee of the Minister of Health and Wellness unanimously recommended, that the rules must cover private health providers as well as public health providers and, in the best traditions of opposition, challenging the government to tell us which of those 60-odd amendments they will accept and to negotiate those that are unacceptable. That's, with respect, I think what Albertans want to see.

This is a contentious bill that affects every citizen in the province. Why wouldn't we do our absolute level best to ensure that we meet the concerns of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Alberta Medical Association, a long list, and all of those people, Mr. Speaker, who have sent us e-mails and letters and made telephone calls expressing their concern?

I say this in the most constructive way I can think of, that the opposition is prepared to sit and negotiate and to discuss and to debate those sections, and I look forward to the government accepting that challenge.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Third Reading

Bill 208
Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 208, Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a few minutes to respond to some of the issues that were raised during earlier debate on this bill. First, I would like to confirm the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark regarding selective enforcement; that is, applying the law on a pilot or a phase-in basis across Alberta. Legislative Counsel from the Department of Justice indicates there are examples, including, as an illustration, subsection (5) of section 255 of the Criminal Code, "for curative treatment in relation to . . . consumption of alcohol or drugs," applicable only in certain provinces.

I want to assure the Member for Edmonton-Riverview that this bill is to protect our youth from the hazards of tobacco use. We are told that the long-term health costs of today's smoking youth will be very, very significant in the future. I believe that in 10, 20, or 30 years today's youth will be grateful for any measure that is taken today to curb youth tobacco use. The member expressed concern that advertising of tobacco products is not addressed in Bill 208. Advertising, however, is addressed in the federal Tobacco Act.

The members for Edmonton-Norwood and Edmonton-Rutherford expressed their preference for a strong emphasis on education in addressing the problem of youth smoking. Mr. Speaker, this bill is presented as one component of a comprehensive youth antitobacco program. The Woodridge model has been referred to many times in our debates as a very successful youth antitobacco program, where rates dropped as much as 70 percent. The three pillars of that program are, number one, strong retailer compliance of supply restraint laws; number two, youth antipossession laws; and number three, a strong education prevention program. Education is very important, but to achieve maximum results, it must be accompanied by legislation. That is why we have the federal Tobacco Act in force and Bill 208 before us.

2:50

The Member for Highwood stressed the point that this legislation is enabling. It enables community partners from Health, Education, Justice, Children's Services, businesses, municipal government, parents, and indeed students to establish effective antitobacco programs. We in the Legislature are also their partners. It is our role to provide the necessary legislation to that end. Bill 208 is

useful legislation in protecting our youth from the health risks associated with tobacco use.

The Member for Calgary-Foothills spoke of the need for the government to take the bull by the horns in addressing a problem that to this point has only been addressed on a piecemeal basis. By passing Bill 208, I believe we'll be taking a very significant step forward in addressing the problem at the consumption level where it does the most harm to our kids.

I'd like to address a concern related to test purchases by minors to enforce retailer compliance of the federal Tobacco Act. Specifically, there is a concern that minors, in gathering evidence of illegal tobacco sales to minors, would technically be in possession when making a purchase. In that Bill 208 is enabling legislation, only pilot or youth tobacco control areas of Alberta would be affected. I propose, to alleviate this concern, that a government amendment to exempt minor purchases involved in the federal government retailer enforcement programs be introduced prior to proclamation of the bill. There is no intent in Bill 208 to restrict federal programs, and I believe this will address any concerns.

The programs emulating from this bill would only be successful with a committed partnership approach involving federal and provincial legislation, local municipalities, Health, Education, Children's Services, Justice, business communities, parents, and most importantly youth themselves. From what I have determined, the time is ripe for such a co-operative venture.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to listen to the rest of the debate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to stand and support this bill. From the outset I'd like to say that smoking is an absolutely filthy, disgusting habit that kills people, robs children of their parents, and robs parents of their children. This is something this Assembly knows full well, my views on smoking. I believe the hon. member is to be commended for his goal to go ahead and make it illegal for children to be able to smoke.

Mr. Speaker, one of the huge hypocrisies in legislation is that it is illegal to sell a child a cigarette, but it is not illegal for the child to have that cigarette. I think that's one of the huge hypocrisies in our legislation. From what I understand, this was included in the federal Tobacco Act or a variation thereof and it was deliberately left out by the federal government. I believe that was halfhearted of them to do that, and I feel that the hon. member is making amends for what was left out of the Canadian legislation.

I have only one criticism of this legislation, and that is that I would have made it stronger. I've talked to the hon. member about this. If it would have been my legislation, Mr. Speaker, I would have made it mandatory across the province.

AN HON. MEMBER: Big Brother.

DR. OBERG: No, it is not Big Brother, hon. member. What it is trying to save kids' lives. Mr. Speaker, if they don't worry about that, if they aren't concerned about that, then they should get out of this Legislature. I find it absolutely amazing that the hon. members are sitting over there laughing at me when I talk about saving kids' lives. This is exactly the same as they're doing with the Health Information Act and all the other health acts. They could care less about kids. They could care less about kids who are dying. If kids start smoking at 12, 13, 14, or 15 years of age, I will guarantee you that they will die from cigarette smoking. What this hon. member

is trying to do is stop that, and he's to be absolutely, one hundred percent, unequivocally commended for that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 208, in its third reading, Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act, is certainly well intended. I have no quarrel with the member's intentions. I have no quarrel with the Minister of Learning's intentions. Everyone wants to save our children. Who doesn't? It's an apple pie and motherhood kind of statement.

We don't want to hurt our children. That is true, but then we need to find the appropriate means. We need to diagnose the problem first before we start shooting at it. To bring the strap back, to start spanking our little babies, and to start fining them as soon as we find a cigarette in their hand is the wrong way to go about it. We need to understand what causes young children to want to smoke.

Just about a month ago in the *Edmonton Journal*, Mr. Speaker, a big story said, "Young targeted by tobacco giants." Why are big cigarette companies who already make billions and billions of dollars from all of us, adults and children, targeting the youth in particular? That's the question we must first ask and then answer it one way or the other by saying: to what extent, what these companies do in targeting young people, and how effective is their targeting in driving these kids toward a lifestyle of which smoking becomes an integral part? That question simply isn't addressed here. That question is simply bypassed.

We know that there is evidence, mountains of evidence now, that the companies have been doing this deliberately, systematically. They have been spending tens of millions of dollars to achieve this goal of convincing young people, turning them into what they call starters, to start smoking. So if we understand how teenagers adopt certain ways of doing things, how they adopt certain behaviours – and all of us should know this. I think we have all dealt with children, teenagers in our families, in our communities, in our schools.

We know that teenagers are very much subject to influence by their peers. Peer group influence is one of the most powerful influences. These companies understand this, Mr. Speaker. In fact, they use the findings of adolescent psychology to design their campaigns to target young people. They know that they can succeed, because they use that psychology very intelligently, systematically, steadfastly. In this bill there is a refusal to understand that, to even acknowledge the fact that peer group influence is one of the most powerful influences on children when they're in their teenage years.

Unless we address the issue using available science as well as common sense, which is available to us on the basis of our own experience, and unless we take into account the powerful tools that cigarette manufacturers use in order to convert our innocent kids into cigarette smokers, we won't succeed.

A \$100 fine, a maximum of \$100, up to \$100 – that's what the bill says – to be levied against a child if the child is caught in possession of tobacco or smoking it, is no means of solving the problem if we know that the cause lies elsewhere.

3:00

I can share this information with the House, Mr. Speaker, with your permission. As we were going around the province last year, seven or eight of us, as members of the Justice public hearings committee, we had parents and professional groups come before us to advise us about how we should deal with youth crime, not by imposing more punishment on them. One of the reasons, they argued, that we shouldn't simply consider slapping them with

harsher punishment and sentences and all of that to control their behaviour, to modify their behaviour, to change their behaviour, was that children at that age are not capable of forming intent. That's a psychological finding of indisputable status. If they are not able to form intent, then how can we justify treating them as engaging in offences for which they should be punishable by a fine of \$100? After all, the consequence should be related to the intent.

In this case I don't see any attention being paid to the whole question of how that intent is in a formative stage and how that intent itself was shaped by these powerful forces represented in our sacrosanct transnational corporations which manufacture this poison and then peddle it around the world, increasingly going under the rules of globalization in Third World countries to find their victims. As more and more of us become aware of the lethal effects of tobacco smoking, these companies are spreading their wings to Third World countries that we are opening up to them so that they can go and do this trade in death and destruction, and they are doing the same thing here with our children.

It's important for us to be frank about saying that we need to first understand the causes of how a child's inclination to smoke is formed, what the powerful forces at work are, and try to stop those forces from working towards converting our children into starters and smokers. If you don't do it, your slapping this \$100 fine will simply drive them underground. They will, in fact, do it more consistently. They know, then, that adults who should know better are ignoring signs, ignoring knowledge, ignoring their own experience, and just turning around and slapping these kids when in fact they should be slapping someone else. That someone else, Mr. Speaker, I submit first and foremost, is these tobacco companies.

Imperial Tobacco Limited, ITL, released documents under Guildford papers in Britain just a couple of months ago that indicate mountains of evidence about how this company, this Imperial Tobacco Limited, which produces the cigarette line called Player's and duMaurier and all of that, has targeted young people in our own communities and how they achieve results. If it is the case that those companies are indeed the major players in convincing our children that smoking is good for you – it certainly is good for the companies; we know that. But if they also try to tell our kids that it's good for them, then that's where we must start. This bill, Mr. Speaker, simply ignores addressing that problem.

We know that in the U.S. many state governments have addressed the matters as they should be addressed. They have taken these companies to court and had hundreds of billions of dollars awarded against the social damage that these companies have done, as much as \$243 billion to be paid over the next 20 years to state governments and to public authorities who are responsible for public health, who are responsible for making sure that children are protected against undue exploitation by any commercial interest including these companies.

What are we doing? I think we should be looking at what B.C. has done. They have challenged these companies, taken them to court. I see a chilling silence here in this House, certainly from the government side. All I find is the Minister of Learning standing up and not even acknowledging – he should be aware of the fact that there is a social learning theory which draws their attention to how children learn to do certain things. Not knowing what that social learning theory is saying is an interesting commentary on the Minister of Learning, on his notion of what learning is.

I don't think we should be misled by a simple solution that our children will be saved from becoming smokers. I think they must be saved. We must do everything that we can, but this is not the point where we should start. Smoking is lethal. It's lethal for adults and even more lethal for children, no doubt. I don't think there is any

disagreement in this House over that issue. The point is what are the right means, or are we so incapacitated by our own doctrinal commitments and doctrinal orientations to not touch the real powerful sources that lead to addiction among our children, addiction to tobacco and smoking of tobacco?

This bill refuses to address any of these questions or to even raise these questions or say what needs to be done, what is a multifaceted approach to this youth smoking. It's a single, one-factor solution, and that is give communities, give Camrose or Wetaskiwin or Leduc, the right to fine children if they're found to possess some tobacco or if they're found to be smoking in public places. This is the most simpleminded answer that I've found.

Good intentions, Mr. Speaker, are not enough. The road to hell is often paved by good intentions. I just want to caution this House that just because the intentions behind this bill are good, that doesn't mean the bill is good itself. It will lead us to drive our kids to become, in fact, habitual offenders.

So long as the companies are doing their job, you're only driving these kids to do the stealing that you want to prevent. You want them to become persons who can control their own behaviour, who can in fact see themselves as being accountable to society. You don't do it by alienating them. You don't do it by punishing them while at the same time not doing anything to prevent the real sources of their addiction and their behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, I wish I could extend my support to this well-intentioned but rather misguided bill. I can't for the reasons that I'm giving to the House. I think what we need to do is start to set a good example for our children. We should have the moral courage and the integrity that's required to first challenge the real culprits, which are the tobacco manufacturers. Let's make that statement a public statement. Let's make a start and then go to our kids and say: look; we have done what we can do at this end; now we want to work with you in order to help you overcome these seductions of the marketplace to which you are exposed day and night by the mass media and by these companies. None of that is here, so it's very difficult to support a bill which is so simplistic in the solution it proposes to a rather complex and difficult problem.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to quickly conclude by drawing the attention of the House to the fact that if it is indeed the case that these huge, powerful, wealthy transnational tobacco manufacturing companies have been targeting and targeting systematically our children to render them into smokers and starters, then we should treat our children as victims, not as offenders. It's a strange irony that this bill would treat our children, who are in fact the victims of this massive campaign to turn them into smokers and redefine them, as offenders rather than as victims. Victims need our help. Victims need our total sympathy. Victims need education. Victims don't need another slap in the face.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, this bill in my view – and I'll call on all members of the House. It's not a bill by a party. It's a bill brought before us by a private member with good intentions, but it's not a bill that this House should lend its support to. I won't be doing that.

Thank you.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill is indeed generating a lot of good discussion, and it is a free vote issue, as all private members' bills are on this side of the House. The reality is that there are, I believe, some principles that are supportable in the bill, but the longer this bill sits on the Order Paper, it seems, the more concerns there are that we are hearing from the various groups

that in fact would have to either enforce the bill or would have to live with the consequences of the bill.

I would like to make reference to a bulletin that I believe all MLAs should have received. I don't know if they have or if they haven't, Mr. Speaker. It's put forward by the Alberta Lung Association, the Calgary regional health authority – and the members from Calgary should probably pick up their ears at that particular one – Action on Smoking and Health, which we all know is a very active advocacy group that is aimed at ensuring that smoking is not prevalent in our society, and the Alberta/Northwest Territories division of the Canadian Cancer Society, exactly the group that the Minister of Learning would, I'm sure, agree does not want to see children in this province dying.

It says:

Amendments to Bill 208 approved last week by the Committee of the Whole . . .

That's us in this Legislative Assembly.

. . . may jeopardize the enforcement of the federal Tobacco Act by prohibiting test purchases by minors. Health Canada presently relies upon test purchases by minors to gather evidence of illegal tobacco sales to minors. In fact, test purchases are a cornerstone of the federal tobacco enforcement initiative. Bill 208 (as amended) will make it illegal for Health Canada to employ this enforcement strategy and to properly enforce the federal Tobacco Act . . .

We have requested . . .

And again I'll repeat those organizations at this point: the Alberta Lung Association, the Calgary regional health authority, Action on Smoking and Health, the Canadian Cancer Society, and I believe there are others as well, including the Edmonton Police Association.

. . . an amendment to Bill 208 to provide an exemption for test purchases by minors. We have since been instructed that an amendment at this stage of the . . . process is problematic and may forestall the passage of the bill. In the event that an amendment is not possible, we have requested formal assurances . . .

That would be formal assurances from I believe either the minister of health, the Minister of Justice, or the Premier.

. . . that an exemption for test purchases by minors will be passed prior to . . .

These are their words.

. . . the proclamation of Bill 208. We are awaiting such assurances.

It goes on to further say, "The organizations represented on this bulletin have not endorsed Bill 208."

So, in fact, there is a constituency out there – I'm not sure if they have been fully consulted. Obviously their concerns have not been heard with regard to the bill, and they have not endorsed this private member's bill.

I found it actually very interesting that the Minister of Learning would talk about hypocrisy in this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, when in fact the Minister of Learning, who has been a member of cabinet for many years now, would have had the authority as either the minister of social services or currently as the Minister of Learning to bring forward a government bill that would do what this private member's bill does. Why in fact then, Mr. Minister, did your government not bring forward this bill if you have the audacity to talk about hypocrisy in this Legislative Assembly with regard to the federal government and what they have done? Look in your own backyard before you throw stones, Mr. Minister.

The concerns that have been expressed by both the Minister of Government Services last week and the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona with regards to the targeting of youth by ad companies and the unwillingness of the government to pursue the advertising companies are I think points well taken that I believe need to be pursued in terms of ensuring that our youth are truly prevented from utilizing tobacco.

The question I would also like to raise that was not very clear in

the member's introduction on third reading – he indicated there would be a government amendment concerning the problem identified by the associations I noted earlier that would amend the legislation prior to proclamation of the act. I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker, how that can be done. If we do not amend the legislation at this stage, it needs to be proclaimed, I would imagine, and then brought back as a government bill to be amended.

It was also a little bit confusing because the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose seemed to indicate that the government would be providing an amendment to federal legislation, and I'm not sure how we can amend federal legislation. Our authority is not at that level.

I worry that the concerns that have been put forward by these associations have not been adequately addressed and will cause problems in enforcing the legislation that now exists with regards to retailer compliance. So while we may have dealt with one section of the whole issue of how you control youth from smoking, we are undermining and endangering a key component, which is the retailer compliance, because in fact how do you find out if a retailer is complying if you do not have someone who is underage asking for those cigarettes? That is not in the legislation, and if it is to be amended, then I would suggest to the member that he bring a reasoned amendment forward in this Legislative Assembly. We had an example of that last night, where we did try to make legislation better by having a reasoned amendment brought forward so we can bring it back to Committee of the Whole and deal with the concerns of the people that have been put forward.

I have another question that was not explained or addressed by the member, and that has to do with some comments that were made I believe in today's *Journal* that indicated that each municipality would have the ability to determine what the fine is. That would then make it, I understand – and I know that the Member for Edmonton-Norwood with her experience will be able to deal with this issue a lot better than I can – a bylaw issue, and I think that can be a problem with regards to the court structure. So the Member for Edmonton-Norwood can explain that particular aspect of it.

The principle of having a concerted approach to dealing with youth smoking I have no problem with. The principles of looking at retailer compliance, youth antipossession legislation, education programs: I believe that can be a package that is manageable and can achieve some reduction. It won't achieve all of the reduction but can achieve some of the reduction in youth tobacco use. I do agree that we need to look at exactly what is occurring with regard to the ad companies that currently seem to have a free hand when it comes to targeting our youth.

3:20

With the concerns that I have now had put in front of me, I believe this bill is flawed and that it needs to at least be sent back to the committee stage before passage in order to ensure that the concerns of the various groups, including, it's my understanding, Health Canada, who did speak with the member, it's again my understanding, and inform him that this was an issue. He did not deal with the issue when he was informed of it prior to bringing it to this Legislative Assembly and other groups out there as well that are concerned about the retailer compliance and the enforcement initiative.

So, unfortunately, we seem to be getting a one-sided approach that I don't think serves well in terms of addressing youth tobacco use. In fact, though I support the principle, I have problems with the legislation as it now stands and the concerns that have been put forward by various groups to the member and have obviously not been addressed.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to respond to certain concerns, in particular to the rantings and the ravings of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, who's speaking so vehemently against the tobacco lobby and certainly against the big tobacco companies. You would think that we were advocating for their well-being as a large company. In essence, really, what I would like to point out is that what this bill does is form a small part in the action against smoking for us to assist the young people in resisting the temptation to become addicted to smoking.

In fact, as I listen to the member and then listen to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, I felt that some of them have in their opposition sort of worked themselves into a lather of inactivity. In fact, I'd say almost into a paralysis of action against smoking. You would think that just because someone has brought forth a bill which will assist young people – and the law will assist them – in not becoming addicted to smoking that they are against it, which I find very, very contradictory. In their intent and in their efforts to be so accusatory towards someone who has brought one small step to assist young people in looking at a way in which they can address this issue, this social issue among young people, I find that they are being quite negligent in addressing the issue that we're looking at here.

The other thing that I would like to say in support of this bill is that I think it does endorse our respect for young people and the choices that they can make personally. They can make these choices personally, and in order for them to do that, the law can give them some guidance. The enforcement of it, which is a concern that has been raised, need not be something that is punitive. It need not be something that requires that they appear before the court because they have either possession or are involved in smoking and have been apprehended as such. It has discretionary ability on the part of those who are going to assist, again, the young people in realizing that this is not an acceptable activity in public.

So I would bring you to the second amendment that was made to the original bill, and that second amendment spoke most specifically about the fact that this can be, if you will, a pilot project. A community can choose to do so. They can choose to be engaged in it. They can choose to take it as a project in order, again, to assist the young people in their community.

With that understanding of the discretionary nature of enforcement I would advocate then, I would encourage everybody to support this bill, because it is something that is one small tool that can assist others in encouraging young people to live according to the law and not against it.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have some concerns, a great deal of concern with this bill for a number of reasons. I'm reminded of when I was about 13 or 14 and it was the last day of school. I was in grade 8, and all my friends – we all went down to the lake, and I bought a pack of cigarettes, MacDonald's Menthol, and I smoked all of them in about two hours. I recall that. I drove home rather green on my bicycle, wobbling all over, and I went to bed. The next day, after I was throwing up all night and not feeling well, my mother had said to my brothers to do my chores. My brothers were not going to do my chores because they spilled the beans. They said: "No, Sue doesn't have the flu. She was smoking MacDonald's Menthol cigarettes, and she smoked a whole pack." So, of course, I had to get up and do my chores, and I was very, very ill. However, that had far more impact on me than would a \$100 fine.

I sit back and I think about that often, because that was not a very grown-up thing to do, if you will, at the time, and during the night I didn't feel very grown up at all. I look at this bill, and I understand the motivation from the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, but I sit back and I think: is this how we need to approach this particular issue?

I don't support smoking nor would I support my son if he chose to smoke, but, you know, I read an article in the *Edmonton Sun*. There was one doctor talking about kids not having enough limits. Well, that's my job. My job as a parent is to put limits on my child. It's not to enshrine those limits in law, because we all have different ideas about how we're going to bring up our kids and what we're going to let them do.

I understand also from an article in the newspaper that the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose talked about a \$100 fine. This whole issue of a \$100 fine concerns me because he said: it's up to a \$100 fine. Well, if there isn't a specified penalty, then there's a compulsory court appearance on a provincial statute, on this type of ticket, which means that every youth who received a ticket would have a compulsory court appearance, which means they would have to go to court and plead guilty or not guilty, which means they would have to have a police officer collecting evidence.

This flies in the face of the justice summit's recommendations for alternative measures and those kinds of things and diminishing the court process for kids. So I'm not sure how the hon. member is going to work this out, because if that's not what he intended, then it should be a bylaw. If it's not a provincial responsibility, then it's a municipal responsibility and a municipal bylaw, which we shouldn't be debating in this Legislature. If it's going to be a specified penalty, Mr. Speaker, then it's \$100 or it's \$50. It can't be a range of penalties without having these kids attend court, so I think that's something he needs to address and needs to be clear on.

I find it very interesting, Mr. Speaker, that this is the same group of politicians who are spending millions of dollars fighting the federal gun control legislation because they believe it's an invasion of their privacy and a violation of their property rights. How do you think the kids here feel? How do you think the kids feel in terms of having another law to guide them through something that we as parents should be guiding them through? I find that that is kind of an irony and a bit of a contradiction in values and ideology: laws okay for kids but not for parents.

THE SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has expired.

head: Motions Other than Government Motions
3:30

Special Places Program

516. Ms Carlson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue a reconfigured special places program until it is complete and to establish a panel of independent scientific experts to advise the government on what areas need further protection to conserve the biodiversity of all ecoregions in the province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce Motion 516.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

DR. TAYLOR: We've already got that, Debby. Special places, it's called.

MS CARLSON: Well, we don't have that particular program in special places.

Not only has special places been disbanded, Mr. Speaker, but also what we are specifically requesting here is a science-based framework to work from. The special places program had some serious flaws in it. One of those flaws was that ultimately decisions were not made based on a science-based program, and that's what we are proposing here. The special places program itself needs to be reconfigured because the target to have 12 percent of the province protected has not been met and some natural regions are a long way below target.

Many special places have not been properly protected in this province, Mr. Speaker, and that needs to be addressed. The government has abolished the provincial co-ordinating committee that oversaw the program, so now there is no transition program in place to ensure that it works correctly. We need a panel of independent experts to advise the government because an effective body is needed to replace the co-ordinating role that was previously done by the provincial co-ordinating committee. We need a panel of independent experts because independent, scientific experts will advise the government on what should be done to meet the original goals of the program and Alberta's 1992 commitment to Canada's protection program in support of the UN convention on biodiversity.

To go into the details of the reasons why we need a reconfigured special places program: the first, Mr. Speaker, is that we still have a long way to go before we meet the government targets. Government targeted to protect 81,000 square kilometres by the year 2000. That's 12.2 percent of the province. In 1995 the area protected was 62,207 square kilometres. At that time over 8 percent of the province was protected in natural parks and only about 1.6 percent was in provincial lands. The target would see another 2.8 percent of provincial lands protected, and that's an important figure. We need to hit those targets. This government has only protected about one-third of the target area since 1995, and the remaining two-thirds need to be protected in the next 16 months.

Put another way, at the present time only about half of the total area of provincial lands are protected that need to be to reach the year 2000 target. In January 1999 major environmental groups pointed out that if only another 10 major areas that were already nominated were designated, the government would have achieved 70 percent of their target. Since the Whaleback has been protected since then, there are nine sites identified that are still awaiting designation, Mr. Speaker. So we have a long way to go.

Interim protection from posting oil and gas rights in nominated areas will expire at the end of 1999. A scientific advisory committee could emphasize the importance of extending this deadline until completion of the special places program, December 31, 2000. There is a lot of support for doing this in the province, and we hope that the minister and the government will take this under serious consideration, Mr. Speaker.

The level of protection varies from one natural region to the other right now in the province. While targets have been reached in the Canadian Shield and the Rocky Mountains – the Rocky Mountain area is almost all federal land – there are serious shortfalls in other regions. Boreal forests are 40 percent short of their target; grasslands, 84 percent short of their target; foothills, 87 percent short of their target; parkland, 95 percent short of their target. So we've got a long way to go before we reach the kind of protection that this government has committed to in this province.

The second reason why we need to be taking a look at a reconfigured special places program is that protected areas are often not

properly protected. This government has moved from the original four goals by including economic development as one of their goals. The government has permitted new economic activity to jeopardize the special places process. They should work to phase out any oil and gas wells or logging from designated areas. Instead, the government has done exactly the opposite. For example, new wells were permitted in the Rumsey natural area after designation. New wells were permitted in Fort Assiniboine wildland park after designation. Timber allocations were made in the Chinchaga area after the area was nominated as a special place. In September 1999 Amoco applied to put a new pipeline through the Rumsey natural area, so we're waiting to see if approval will be given to that as well.

A third reason for a reconfigured special places program is that the provincial co-ordinating committee did not function properly when it was functioning. It wasn't very satisfactory, primarily due to its composition. It consisted of representatives from industry, forestry, and municipalities. Initially three environmental groups had representation on the committee. The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and the Federation of Alberta Naturalists left in 1998 because they felt the committee was not doing a proper job to protect the natural environment. They were concerned, Mr. Speaker, because the government was authorizing oil and gas development, logging, and off-road vehicle use in new parks and other protected areas, and the new Natural Heritage Act would also allow industrial activities in Alberta parks. Only the World Wildlife Fund remained to observe the progress that was occurring on that committee.

The government disbanded the provincial co-ordinating committee on March 31, 1999. This was before the completion of the special places program, when the province was still far short of its own targets. Mr. Speaker, the government needs to get the program back on track.

A fourth reason for a reconfigured special places program is that local committees did not always function properly under the old regime. Local committees were allowed to determine the management for areas. Their interests may favour more access or development than is permissible for the protection of species. In the Castle area the government allowed the local committee to make recommendations that were counter to the findings of its own conservation agency. They were allowing drilling, logging, and motorized off-road access in the Castle forest land use zone even though the Natural Resources Conservation Board recommended against it.

Where local committees favour protection, they do not necessarily get support from the government; for example, the Sheep River area in Kananaskis, the largest remnant of the foothills region in the south Rockies. There the local co-ordinating committee unanimously recommended protection for a larger area than that originally nominated and the oil and gas leases held in the area have been offered for voluntary surrender by the leaseholders, but the government has not yet accepted their proposal. It seems to be unbelievable that a government wouldn't accept back the oil and gas leases when people were working to protect areas that were significant in this province, but that is exactly what happened.

Special places has worked well in some areas, particularly in the Shield, where there were no conflicting interests, and in the Bow corridor, where the government agreed to strong proposals for protection, but there are many areas where it really didn't work. Having a science-based committee of experts would certainly help the process in terms of determining what areas do need to be protected.

Here are some reasons why we need a science-based committee of experts. We need this committee to get the special places program back on track and depoliticize it, if possible. It is important to educate the government on the need to return to the program's

original goals. We need this science-based committee of experts to return to the scientific basis for protection.

Quoting out of the Special Places 2000 book itself on page 6, the government at that time stated:

The land classification system called Natural Regions (subregions) and Natural History Themes provides the scientific basis for the identification, review and designation of Special Places.

Unfortunately, this particular application wasn't used when it came to actually designating the sites. Many reasons, many of them political, were the ultimate reasons for designating sites in order to facilitate ongoing or forthcoming economic development, not the science-based determinants that were put in the government's own papers.

We need, Mr. Speaker, a science-based committee of experts to determine what areas still need protection to ensure that adequate areas of each ecoregion are protected to maintain all species in the ecoregion. Protecting habitat is essential for the protection of species. We need a science-based policy to ensure that representative areas of sufficient size are protected. Unless areas are of adequate size and are linked together, it is likely that species will decline and eventually die out. This has been shown to be true with the grizzly bears in North America. [interjections] I know you guys don't like grizzly bear stories, but as an indicator species what happens to them is very important in terms of what is happening to other species in the province.

3:40

In years past there were islands of grizzly bears across the western U.S.A. in the 1920s, but they've all disappeared, Mr. Speaker. They've winked out with the exception of those in Yellowstone, and that's because there haven't been adequate, safe corridors for them to travel in. Even these areas will be threatened unless links are created to the north.

To determine where corridors are needed, scientific analysis would be very helpful, and we need to determine those corridors in order to link different protected areas. Corridors are needed to allow species to move between areas, which is essential for the maintenance of a strong gene pool. Setting aside areas for preservation leads to conservation biology.

How do all these reserves fit together across the landscape? How do we link reserves and deal with this fragmentation? Those very important questions need to be answered. In fact, while we get groans from the government side on this issue, the minister stated almost exactly this in answer to a question yesterday in question period. He made a commitment to corridors in this province. He made a commitment to supporting the Yukon to Yellowstone initiative, which is good, Mr. Speaker. Now let's see him walk the talk.

It's easy to say that you're going to do it, but what precisely is he going to do in order to facilitate those corridors? The corridors required go across many major highways in this province and go through many areas that are either under way in terms of aggressive economic development or have recently been approved by this government for aggressive economic development.

That kind of development and wildlife corridors are not compatible land uses, and I really want to know what the minister is going to do to facilitate the commitment that he made in this Legislature yesterday. He needs to ensure that it happens, and we will be watching to see what the progress is. If he were to go to a science-based committee that would help him on the science of the answers and start to build his solutions around that, it would be a solution that would be suitable and would be agreeable to everyone in the province, Mr. Speaker. So we hope that is the kind of framework he will be taking a look at when he honours that commitment.

I would like to know what his time line is in terms of honouring that commitment, as I'm sure many people throughout this province would, because time is running out for many of these species, Mr. Speaker, and the minister knows that. We need a science-based committee to set limits as soon as possible so that industry can move ahead.

I'd like to note that in 1998 there was an agreement between the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and three major environmental groups. Industry will respect science-based proposals, but they want to know where they can go ahead. Industry is ahead of government on this issue, Mr. Speaker. We for sure do not want to impede the ability of industry to do their business in this province, to make a commitment to the people, to the landscape, and to the economy of Alberta. For them to be able to do that in a proactive fashion, they need to know what the rules of the game are going to be, and that's what we're asking for here.

They need to know what areas are going to be designated, what the level of protection is going to be, how ongoing corridors are going to be facilitated in terms of what it is they're doing from an industrial perspective, and they deserve to know that information. They need some certainty in their lives in terms of where they're going forward from a business perspective. Right now they don't have that in this province, and it's hurting them.

We've seen leadership by industry on many issues, leadership that should have come from the government that didn't. I'd like to just list a few examples of those. Amoco handed back its lease in the Whaleback, a landmark decision for them to make and just excellent in terms of preserving a vitally sensitive area. Yes, I hear some applause for that, and Mr. Speaker, that's warranted. That was an excellent step that they took, and I would hope that this government would work more co-operatively in the future in terms of bringing forward the kinds of options that companies can have in these environmentally sensitive areas.

Husky offered to return a lease in the Sheep River area in Kananaskis when their own studies showed the importance of the area to wildlife, but government seems to be unwilling to respond to this particular offer. Now, we're on our second minister in environment and also the minister of energy who do not want to respond to this other than saying a flat out no, so I'm hoping that this current minister will review this and perhaps come to the table on this issue.

Manning Diversified has not requested timber in the Chinchaga area that was allocated to them when the area was nominated as a special place. This is right now an ongoing issue up in that area. Manning knows that they're going to face a lot of opposition from environmentalists. They don't want to do that. They recognize that the area is sensitive and that there are very good reasons for the protection of it, yet the government won't negotiate with them on the issue. So what are they supposed to do? If they give back that lease and don't get a trade of some other area or some other form of compensation, it doesn't make them very competitive in the marketplace. They're wanting to do something there, and the government is tying their hands. Hopefully, that will be an issue that will be addressed soon.

Alberta-Pacific proposed a protected area in the Liege region of its forest management agreement area, but the government went ahead with new oil and gas leases in the area. So, once again, leadership by industry and no leadership by this government. We have to ask why that happens.

Mr. Speaker, we need a science-based committee of experts to set benchmarks in the boreal forest against which to measure the success of forest management practices in harvested areas. The importance of benchmarks has been recognized by the Alberta Forest Management Science Council. The council is a group of

scientists from academic institutions that advise the government on forest management.

In a 1996 report on the draft Alberta forest conservation strategy the council stated:

The role of benchmarks and the role in the conservation of forests should be clearly stated. The council does not understand the scientific basis for implying that the existing Special Places 2000 program will be sufficient and recommends that no limit be specified at this time. It will be an important implementation activity.

We agree with them, Mr. Speaker. We have many times in this Assembly asked for benchmarks and benchmarks in forests that are large enough to sustain natural activity like fires and bug infestations. I've had discussions with the minister on this, and he doesn't seem to be too thrilled with the idea of establishing long-term benchmarks. I'm hoping that he will come around on that particular issue.

The reason the council could not understand the scientific basis is probably because no adequate scientific criteria were used to select special places under the existing program. We saw the minister respond to a question yesterday, too, saying that there was a scientific basis used there, but that certainly has been called into question, and we would like him to explain that.

We need a panel of scientific experts that could examine the impact that logging or seismic activity or oil and gas wells have on species within normally protected areas. They could advise where it is most imperative to phase out activity. We're not saying to take all the activity out, but let's be smart about what we're doing and let's get the activity out of areas that are particularly sensitive. Scientific experts could work in conjunction with the endangered species scientific advisory committee to determine which areas need protecting because they are priority habitat for endangered species. Once again, a hugely important issue and one that gets ignored by this government.

Mr. Speaker, it's time to renew our special places program to ensure that we meet the protection targets. We need scientific experts to ensure that we protect those areas most needed to maintain the full diversity of plants and animals in this province. The special places program was a good idea when it was first started. Unfortunately, because of the way the provincial co-ordinating committee and the local committees got involved in the process, it didn't work very well, but there is a chance to recover here. We are asking the government to do that, to go back to a science-based focus, to work co-operatively with industry, with environmentalists and protect the area that's necessary in this province to be protected, not just for us and not just for current economic activity but for future economic activity and the future of our children in this province. It is important that we leave a heritage and history for them that acknowledges the importance that the landscape of Alberta and the species that reside within it have had in the history of our province.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and speak to Motion 516, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. We are indeed fortunate. Alberta's natural regions have endowed us with a magnificent natural heritage that includes the Rocky Mountains and our foothills and the prairie grasslands and the aspen parks and the vast boreal forests of the north and a very precious segment of the Canadian

Shield in the very northeastern corner of our province that sometimes we forget about.

3:50

As the MLA chair for the provincial co-ordinating committee for Special Places 2000 I have a particular interest in seeing Alberta's natural heritage preserved for future generations, and I share the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie's passion about saving and preserving for future generations the very things that we have today. It's a great opportunity to see a full public consultation process unfold in Special Places 2000, and I hope that I can outline that process today and mitigate the idea of referring the special places program, as I see it now, to a scientific community. I might add, Mr. Speaker, that the process that we came upon worked exceptionally well.

At this point in time I'd like to give the members of the Assembly an idea of the progress of the program to date. We have 52 sites presently designated under the program; they contribute a land base of 611,000 hectares. There are 21 sites that are currently under consideration by local committees, and they will be committing at least over a million hectares of land to the program. There are 14 sites recommended for local committee review or presently under local consultation, over half a million hectares of land. Fourthly, the local committee recommendations of sites that are awaiting potential designation or sites that are streamlined for designation: there are 16 at this point in time, for a total of 351,000 hectares. When you take all four of those, Mr. Speaker, there are 103 sites, or 2,615,000 hectares, in this province contributing to the special places program.

So I urge the Assembly to defeat this motion because, as I will outline for all members of this Assembly, the special places program is an excellent example of public consultation and multistakeholder input. The end result of this program, as I have outlined, is that we will have made great strides towards maintaining Alberta's natural heritage and beauty for future generations.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, we do have a ways to go. Environmental protection is an ongoing process, and this government will stay the course to continue to maintain progressive environmental policies balanced with responsible development. I believe the special places program is evidence that the government is already doing a good job of protecting the environment in a way that involves and benefits Albertans.

The Special Places 2000 program was implemented by the Alberta government in 1995 to complete a network of protected areas that represent each of the six natural regions and their 20 subregions. Through this program the government has set aside lands with preservation and conservation values for the benefit of all Albertans based on the science of the program. About half of the features that make up our six distinctive natural regions are already represented in various existing protected areas, as the sponsoring member of the motion pointed out, including national parks and provincial parks, wilderness areas, natural areas, and ecological reserves.

Special places is only one of the many programs in place to protect the diversity of Alberta's natural heritage. Special places uses a land-based approach to preserve representative examples of Alberta's natural regions based on science. I don't think the people of Alberta would appreciate at this point in time a team of independent scientific experts coming in and telling them what they can do or what they can't do with their land. I think Albertans prefer a system that takes into account the consideration of all stakeholders. I think the municipalities appreciate the opportunity to have input into the process. The special places program places the responsibility for designating areas where it should be, in the hands of Albertans.

I would also like to add that our government is well known for the

importance that it places on public consultation and adequate consideration of all of the views of all stakeholders prior to decisions being made. In fact, this government has even been criticized for consulting with the public too often. Therefore, to reconfigure this program would ultimately be a transfer of the decision-making power from the hands of Albertans to a group of scientists.

In the consultations that I've had with local committees, with the chairs of local committees, and the municipal districts and counties that we've asked to chair and set up local committees, I can assure you that they share the views of my constituents, who have had an integral part in the special places program, and the people of Alberta as a whole that they would never support such a notion. The public consultation process that this government has undertaken to provide a more accessible avenue for Albertans to voice their concerns and therefore have a stake in the actions taken by this government – the special places program is a good example of this type of process, and its achievements to date speak for themselves.

Special places is a priority for our Premier and our government to ensure that examples of the remaining natural heritage features are also included in the system of protected areas for the benefit and enjoyment of our children. This is a strategy that relies on Albertans' direct input on how to best preserve the natural heritage features of our province.

First of all, Albertans were invited to nominate provincial Crown lands for consideration. We received over 400 nominations of sites that Albertans feel should be represented in their protected area system.

Secondly, at the provincial level I chaired a multistakeholder provincial co-ordinating committee that represented the broad interests of Albertans. This committee was appointed by the Minister of Environment and included representatives from industry, municipalities, recreational groups, academia, and environmental organizations. The provincial co-ordinating committee was responsible for identifying the best candidate sites for protection under the program based on the science.

Third, at the local level volunteer local committees were responsible for examining boundary options, developing management guidelines, and recommending appropriate activities for each of the sites. These local committees also ensured that their recommendations respected the rights of existing tenure holders.

Local committees provided opportunities for everyone in the community to get involved by asking individuals and organizations to provide input on draft recommendations. The committees also ensure that public input is combined with detailed site information to prepare a final report for the minister. The depth and breadth of knowledge that we get from the direct input of individual Albertans serving on local committees is crucial to the success of the program. We rely on these volunteer committees to suggest to us the best way to incorporate the natural heritage feature of their communities into our protected areas network.

To date nearly 35 local committees have been established to review 50 candidate sites, as I have said earlier. To give an example, in the Canadian Shield we have six new wildland parks totaling almost half a million acres, that reflects the wishes of the local committee. These magnificent new parks will provide representation of the distinctive natural features that make up the character of Alberta's Canadian Shield region. They are wonderful additions to the Alberta natural heritage system, and they have reflected the care and dedication of work by volunteer local committee members in our northern communities.

The government of Alberta has made tremendous progress in completing the gaps in Alberta's protected areas network. We have received nominations from local committees in the Rocky Moun-

tains as well as local committees in the foothills, grasslands, and natural parks regions. More recommendations are expected soon from other local committees currently under way, particularly in the old forest natural region.

Mr. Speaker, the special places program represents an important component of the Alberta government's commitment to ensuring continued economic prosperity through sustainable development and careful management of our natural resources. The program acknowledges the nature and extent of Alberta's natural resources and their role in creating economic growth and prosperity. The government has stated from the beginning that it will honour existing commitments to tenure holders in both nominated and designated sites. Special places has to balance its main preservation goal with a carefully managed and environmentally responsible development of these pre-existing commitments. These are difficult issues to try and solve. Each site is unique in how the main preservation goal of special places is balanced with the program's other three cornerstones of heritage appreciation, outdoor recreation, and tourism and economic development.

4:00

Not all activities are appropriate for all sites. That is why the government relies on the advice of ordinary Albertans who volunteer to sit on local committees to provide us with recommendations about boundary options, management guidelines, and acceptable activities for each site. On some sites with the highest level of protection no new development is allowed. For example, we have introduced legislative amendments precluding new industrial developments in nearly 1.4 million acres encompassing the Willmore, Kakwa, and Elbow-Sheep sites.

On other sites local committees have recommended that some level of carefully controlled development be allowed. On many sites existing commitments are compatible with the main goal of preservation. For example, in the grasslands natural region good grassland management practices have been responsible for preserving the very values that caused the sites to be nominated in the first place. As well, oil and gas resources can frequently be extracted with no new surface access. The rules regarding development in special places have been clear from the start and provide certainty to Albertans that future generations will inherit a protected areas network reflecting our natural heritage and certainty to businesses as to where and how they can operate in the future.

Albertans can be proud of their special places program and the success to date in preserving representative examples of our natural heritage for the benefit of future generations. In the last eight months alone the program has resulted in the creation of seven new wildland parks totaling almost half a million acres. Special places is progressing on schedule and is expected to be completed by the year 2000, with local committees wrapping up their final recommendations in the new year.

Mr. Speaker, this process takes time and dedication on the part of all Albertans, but the designations to date have proved that it pays off with the strongest possible result in two ways: first, by ensuring that every designation has the support of the local community; and second, by continuing the tradition of careful stewardship and sustainable use of Alberta's natural resources, that have been so important to creating the Alberta advantage.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Alberta want input into the special places program, and in most cases they are the ones most qualified to determine what would be best set aside as a special place, again using the science as a basis for their decisions. We have involved scientific experts at every stage of the program. In fact, the entire

program was designed by scientists to preserve Alberta's natural diversity.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the special places program and particularly proud of the level of public consultation we've used to get where we are now. The last thing we need is to reconfigure a program that is already successful, has successfully served its purpose, and will continue to do so in the future. I say to all members of this Assembly: in view of what I have just outlined, if it isn't broke, then why fix it?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Motion 516. I would like to congratulate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for bringing this forward. There is certainly need in this province for a special places program, and it needs to be reconfigured. We look at the initiative that the government implemented in the spring regarding natural areas in the province, and the overwhelming opinion of Albertans was: back to the legislative drawing board. The hon. member brings this motion forward for discussion by all hon. members of this Assembly at the right time, because we have to decide where we're going in the future, not only with special places, but we also have to discuss what effect special places will have on the future of this province.

That is a future that I believe is going to be reliant on tourism and the tourism industry. This is going to be an area where there is going to be significant economic growth in this province, and we have to have legislation and ideas in that legislation that are sound and agreeable to all. Now, I'm not saying that we should open up wilderness for commercial development, but tourism development has to be part and parcel of any discussion that we have.

Now, the target of the special places program, as I understand it, was to have 12 percent of the province protected. This has not been met, and some natural regions are a very, very long way below that specific target. As I understand it also, Mr. Speaker, many special places are often not properly protected. Unfortunately, the government has abolished the provincial co-ordinating committee that oversaw the entire program.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie talked earlier about the need for a panel of independent experts to advise the government. There are two reasons why we need this panel. There has to be an effective body to replace the co-ordinating role that was previously done by the provincial co-ordinating committee. There is also a need for independent scientific experts to advise the government on what should be done to meet the original goals of the program and Alberta's 1992 commitment not only to the rest of the country and to this province and to the world but a commitment in support of the United Nations convention on biodiversity.

Now, before we have this discussion on special places – when everyone thinks of setting aside our natural areas within the province, we think of the Rocky Mountains and we think of the national parks and we think of the Willmore wilderness area and we think of the regions in the eastern foothills and we think of the Whaleback. We think of these areas, Mr. Speaker. That's what we think of as Alberta. There are so many different regions, and I think that in order to understand the issue, we have to have a look at some of these other regions and what areas have been protected so far.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod was talking about, you know, the public consultation process and how the government in this province is so keen on public consultation. This is getting off topic a little bit, but there was no public consultation when the

Premier decided to float a policy on supper-hour television to talk about public health care. In my view, there is not enough adequate public consultation on the environmental issues.

Now, the Natural Heritage Act is a very positive thing, Mr. Speaker, because the minister said: no; I think we should go back to the citizens. This is exactly what has occurred. What areas – and this is very interesting – have been protected so far? I believe that since March of 1995 the government has announced the protection of over 30 natural areas, one ecological reserve, and three wildland provincial parks, but – and there's always a but to this – no areas have been protected as a direct result of the special places process. This is what I need to remind all hon. members of in this Assembly, that no areas have been protected as a direct result of the special places process. Most areas designated so far had already been identified for protection under an earlier government initiative. This is why this motion is so important to the future of the environment in this province and also to the future of one of our strategic industries, which is tourism.

4:10

Now, permitting economic development in special places: what exactly is going to happen here? Under existing legislation oil and gas development and grazing can be permitted in provincial parks and natural areas. We know that earlier in the Dinosaur provincial park the park boundary was conveniently changed to allow oil and gas exploration. Whenever we talk about a special place, we need to set out right away: what is the definition of a special place? Is it going to change whenever the economic conditions change, or are we going to stick to our original goals?

This motion has to be part of any future discussion on environmental issues. Were there any scientific experts consulted? Was the advice of the oil and gas industry sought whenever this change to the Dinosaur provincial park occurred, or did we look at an independent panel of experts? I don't think so, Mr. Speaker. This is what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is calling for, the establishment of a panel of independent scientific experts. Now, they may have included paleontologists, who perhaps would have said: no, we can't drill here because there's a dinosaur there. Everyone is talking that perhaps the dinosaur is a creature that had feathers, and perhaps there's a fossil there that is going to determine whether this is fact or fiction, but because of the activity that is no longer going to be possible.

Now, we should also look at the Chinchaga region. I mentioned last week in my remarks here in this Assembly about the Chinchaga region and derrick hands going to Banff. The Chinchaga region in northwestern Alberta is an excellent candidate for protection within the boreal forest. Despite the fact that this area has been nominated for protection, in September of 1997 the government amended the Manning Diversified timber quota allocating trees in the area for harvesting. Now, the claim was made that the change was initiated prior to the nomination, but Manning Diversified does not need timber in the near future and had not requested this amendment, as I understand. This suggests to me, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta Forestry is not co-operating in this special places process.

If we're going to have economic development in the future, we have to have a sound special places program in place now, and it cannot be changed. Now, it is interesting to note that the only cases where the government has shown a willingness to prevent new industrial development is in the Willmore wilderness park and in the wildland provincial parks, and I commend the government for this. I see the day, Mr. Speaker, when the Willmore wilderness area, if it's not a provincial park, then maybe will be an area that's associated with Jasper national park and will be set aside for future

generations of Albertans, not just now for the forestry industry or the oil and gas industry. This has to be set aside for future generations.

Protected areas legislation is also being revised, Mr. Speaker, and that will be the new Natural Heritage Act. It's going to be very interesting to see how this motion will influence that legislation in the spring, if at all.

We also need to talk about local committee powers over nomination in management plans. This is where this independent review could be of use: the experts. A major stumbling block to any initiative, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that there has to be the feeling that industry has to come first. Whenever we talk about environmental issues, industry has to be a partner.

Now, we all think of ourselves within the province, but we have to look at ourselves in the global context. We have a presidential race in America, and I would like to remind all hon. members in the Assembly that in the presidential race there are front-runners and there are maybes. One of the front-runners is talking about how he has to come forward with environmental legislation because there is no time left. He is talking about global warming; he's talking about air pollution. He's talking about water and the quality of water and how it affects living standards. These are all issues that are moving to the front of all public debate and policy decisions. We can't casually dismiss this motion, because it is a building block or a stepping-stone to the future.

Other countries are realizing that they can only dream about having the debate that we're having in this Assembly this afternoon. They don't have any fresh air left. They don't have any water that's not polluted. They can't even entertain the debate of perhaps setting aside more public lands for future generations. They can't talk about having areas that may be designated for skiers. They can't talk about having areas that may be designated for snowmobilers or people who ride dirt bikes.

We only have to look at any major highway leading either to the city of Edmonton or the city of Calgary on a long weekend, whether it be in the summer or in the winter, to see how important the wide open space in this province is to Albertans. Just go out to a coffee shop in the west end of the city, out toward Spruce Grove, and sit there and look at the traffic going by. There are campers, motor homes, family cars with skis strapped to the roof. Everyone is getting out, and everyone in this province appreciates our environmental diversity.

Will we have any left if we continue without the cautions that are spoken about by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie? I rather doubt it. Will we have water in the north that is fit to drink? Will you be able to catch a fish in the Smoky River and eat it? I rather doubt it. We need to realize this. We can't wait for the Americans or for an international conference, whether it be in Japan or Rio de Janeiro; we can't wait for other people to tell us what to do. We must seize this opportunity, realize what we've got in this province, and not only set it aside for the children and the grandchildren that are yet to come but set it aside so that industry can prosper and we all can live healthy, fulfilling, prosperous lives in a sound province that has environment concerns at the top of the political agenda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise today and speak on Motion 516, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. There are many issues concerning Albertans that arise from this motion before us today. The motion urges the government to establish a scientific panel "to advise the

government on what areas need further protection to conserve the biodiversity of all ecoregions in the province.”

First of all, Mr. Speaker, there are some inaccuracies behind this motion we will be debating this afternoon. Our government has long maintained its commitment to environmental protection and sustainable development. It is true that the quality of life cannot be separated from the quality of our environment, and that is why I understand and appreciate this member’s intention.

The primary goal of this motion is to enhance the protection of our environment. This government is fully aware that a productive and sustainable environment is an enrichment of our lives and secures our future. To maintain the quality of the environment, our government is committed to protection, conservation, and sustainable development. The special places program is a cornerstone of this government’s approach to environmental protection. It is a great success. It has projects which, I am proud to say, I’ve been a part of and projects that Albertans can say they’re proud to be a part of.

Mr. Speaker, the special places program is made in Alberta by Albertans. It is a fine example of combining the efforts of the community, organizations, and environmental groups with those of government experts and Members of the Legislative Assembly to come up with ecological protection plans that will benefit all Albertans. This strategy relies on Albertans’ direct input, not special interest groups’, to put a plan together that will help protect the natural heritage features of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I will outline for you today the program that was developed on a foundation of sound science and government policies. Our government drew on the extensive expertise that we have in our Department of Environment to set out clear conservation goals as well as a strategy for acting on them. The special places program uses a variety of existing legislative and policy positions to preserve Alberta’s natural heritage. Each site is unique in how the main preservation goal is balanced with the government’s three cornerstone goals of recreation, heritage appreciation, tourism and economic development.

Since 1995, Mr. Speaker, 1,555,000 acres, 52 sites, have been designated, of a size that is larger than the province of Prince Edward Island. Significant progress has been made in each of the six natural regions, which include the Canadian Shield, Rocky Mountain foothills, grasslands . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. I’m going by the clock, which is at 55 minutes. The Clerk is reminding me that the 55 minutes are in fact up. I regret having to interrupt the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must put all questions to conclude debate on the motion under consideration.

On the motion as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, all those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: All those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:26 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner	Gibbons	Olsen
Carlson	Leibovici	Pannu
Dickson	MacDonald	Soetaert

Against the motion:

Amery	Herard	Paszkowski
Broda	Hierath	Pham
Burgener	Jacques	Renner
Cao	Johnson	Severtson
Cardinal	Jonson	Shariff
Coutts	Klapstein	Smith
Doerksen	Kryczka	Stelmach
Ducharme	Magnus	Stevens
Dunford	Marz	Strang
Fischer	McClellan	Taylor
Forsyth	McFarland	Thurber
Friedel	Melchin	Trynchy
Graham	Nelson	Yankowsky
Haley	Oberg	Zwozdesky
Hancock	O’Neill	

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 44
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 516 lost]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 46
Miscellaneous Statutes
Amendment Act, 1999 (No. 2)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move Bill 46, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 1999 (No. 2), for second reading.

This is, of course, the act which comes in with the agreement of all sides of the House as dealing with miscellaneous matters and normally proceeds without debate.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the understanding is that generally this particular bill proceeds without debate in this Legislature, but at this particular time, rather than hold up the changes that the Minister of Environment wanted to make to the Provincial Parks Act, we felt we’d take a moment to put a few comments on the record about our concerns and our opposition in principle to the changes that are going into this particular part of the act. We could, of course, have refused to agree to allow this to go forward in Miscellaneous Statutes, in which case changes that have already been made within the department would not have been made in the legislation until the following spring. So in the interest of being co-operative, we are making a few comments at this time, and then we’ll support this particular bill.

4:40

The changes that I’m referring to are in the Provincial Parks Act,

where sections are being struck out that formerly said "park ranger" and "conservation officer" now being substituted. Our problem with this, Mr. Speaker, is that over the course of the last year both park rangers and wildlife officers have been eliminated from the department. They have been given a new name, conservation officers. The new name comes with combined duties, and that creates a bit of a problem. In the past, wildlife officers had quite a bit of experience and expertise in areas dealing with matters in parks and natural areas outside of an office setting, and they were very good at their jobs. With this new role that they're having to fulfill, most of them are sitting in offices giving out permits and things of that nature, and their expertise is not being used here in an adequate fashion.

Our concern with this having been done is that there was very little input from those involved in the process, those most directly affected by making this change. As a consequence and as a consequence of the change in the duties that these officers now have, they are very demoralized within the department. We are hearing from a large constituency who work within the department and those most directly affected by those officers who are very concerned that that expertise is no longer being used, and we want to make sure that those concerns are put on the record.

We know that the reason this was done was because of the massive cutbacks that Environment has faced over the last few years, 50 percent to their budget, and more than 30 percent of the people are gone now. This is an attempt to compensate for not having enough staff in any one place, to now have these duties combined and shared and stretched, but, Mr. Speaker, it isn't a good move. So in principle we are adamantly opposed to this particular change. We do not think it serves the constituency who needs the services of the former wildlife officers very well at all, and we would like to have those comments on the record and to state that we support these new conservation officers in their new duties.

Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I want to add a couple of comments as well. Firstly, I want to recognize and thank Mr. Peter Pagano, one of the treasures in the Department of Justice, who through his tenacity and resourcefulness and just persistence is able each year to take a myriad of proposals for miscellaneous statutes and ensure that information is forthcoming, that supporting documentation is prepared. We don't manage to salute often enough civil servants who do outstanding work in the service of the province, and I wanted to note that about Mr. Pagano.

The other comment I'd just make is that Bill 46 in fact is much skinnier than some earlier drafts that had come forward. I just want on the record to signal the opposition's concern that miscellaneous statutes were always intended to correct the missing word, the typographical error, the two clauses or three sentences in a bill that needed changing. I've noted that in recent years we're starting to move to ministers putting forward larger and larger substantive amendments which they would want included in a miscellaneous statutes amendment act.

I wanted to serve notice on the record, Mr. Speaker, to each of the members of Executive Council that we will resist efforts to put things in miscellaneous statutes that properly ought to come in as a separate bill. Those bills may be supported, like the Alberta Stock Exchange Restructuring Act or the Regulated Accounting Profession Act, but the point is that those belong in bills, not miscellaneous statutes. I hope the ministers' offices will prepare their spring legislative agenda accordingly.

I might also thank the Government House Leader for his courtesy and his assistance in helping us to (a) get the bill a little earlier every year and (b) for the opportunity to have people in government try

and attend to concerns and questions, which obviates many what would otherwise be objections to items going into a miscellaneous statutes amendment act.

Thank you, sir.

[Motion carried; Bill 46 read a second time]

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Third Reading

Bill 7
Alberta Health Care Insurance
Amendment Act, 1999

Mr. White moved that Bill 7, Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act, 1999, be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day six months hence.

[Adjourned debate December 6: Mr. Hancock]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, I believe we're speaking to a hoist amendment on Bill 7, and that's kind of sent as a little message to the government that should show that there are concerns about this bill. I have spoken to those concerns in committee and most definitely at third reading.

I think this bill went through fairly quickly until we found out that the doctors, the very ones affected by this bill, were not consulted and were not a part of the decision on this bill. I find that interesting from a government who likes to go on and on about roundtables and summits and consultation. The very people that this bill affects weren't consulted, weren't in favour of it, and it's being pushed through. Shouldn't that give you pause? Shouldn't we just maybe let this bill die on the Order Paper, address it properly over the break, and come back with a decent amendment to this? You know, legislation goes by very quickly in here when it's good legislation. Thank goodness we have opposition with keen eyes and good consultative processes who talk to the people involved in legislation and find out where they've been ignored and bring their issues to this Legislature.

It's interesting. People think that if they work with the government, everything will work fine. It kind of reminds me that our lawyer will say: "You know what, Colleen? We give you advice because we want to keep you out of trouble, not get you out of it, so that you don't make mistakes, so that you follow the letter of the law. Lawyers prefer to prevent it rather than bailing people out. So here is legislation that we're going to have to bail out again, and thank goodness we do that.

Now, I know I've said this, so I don't mean to repeat myself, but I may.

AN HON. MEMBER: It bears repeating.

MRS. SOETAERT: It bears repeating. This is an issue of power and control. It's interesting, on the one hand, that the Premier will say: "Oh, what do you mean by private health care? Every doctor is a private operator." Yet they legislate them. You know, that's kind of contradictory, I would suggest, that they can say one thing on one hand, that they're private businesses all within the private business realm, yet on the other hand legislate them without their knowledge, without even having them buy in as partners. I mean, that's talking out of both sides. It really is. I don't think that's appreciated. So the next time I hear that doctors are private practitioners and that

they have their own private business, I'll have to heckle Bill 7: hello, Bill 7. Now, the outside world may not catch that, but certainly doctors and members of this Assembly would.

I would think that this government would have another look. A hoist amendment just means: bring it back in six months. Does it not mean that?

4:50

MR. HANCOCK: It means it never comes back.

MRS. SOETAERT: It means it never comes back? That's an even better amendment.

In fact, here it says that it was moved that the motion for third reading be amended by deleting all the words after the word "that" and substituting

that Bill 7, Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act, 1999, be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day six months [from now].

I guess the House leader on the other side didn't know that. That's the amendment we're on.

If it does mean pulling it from the Order Paper and revisiting it next time, after consultation with doctors and touching base with them, I bet you we would pass it within three days in the spring sitting. We could do that. We could almost – almost – promise that. We'd have to make sure that they had been consulted, because we've found that in other situations they say: yeah, yeah, these people have been consulted. But what they forgot to tell us is that they didn't like the bill. "Oh, yes, we've consulted them; they're in full knowledge of what's going on." Except they don't like it. They forgot to mention that in the Legislature. I think that was the issue with the smoking bill, though that's a private member's bill, not a government bill, I'm well aware. "Oh, yeah, they know about it," but they didn't like it.

Here we are with another bill. People didn't know about it, they don't like it, and we're pushing it forward. Bill 40 is another prime example: yeah, we've consulted, but no, they didn't like it. They just forgot to mention that in this Assembly: oh, yes, people are well in favour of it, except for . . . And the list goes on and on and on and on.

So here we are, Mr. Speaker, with Bill 7. I would urge the powers that be to say in your next caucus meeting: "You know what, you guys? I really have had a lot of hassle from doctors, and this really isn't a fair bill for them. So why are we pushing ahead with it? We are on third reading. It's maybe getting close to the end of session, and maybe this bill isn't worth putting ahead." [interjections] People say: it's getting close to Christmas. True enough, but good legislation is very important, and if it means staying here a few extra days, well, so be it. [interjections] Some people say that I don't have to get ready for Christmas. Obviously, a man is saying that. They may buy one present – maybe – and wrap it the night before. Every woman in this Assembly, on both sides of the House, will know that our preparations are much more extensive. Wait till they market that one around the world.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member is encouraged to confine her thoughts to the hoist amendment, that's before the House. We're all looking forward to Christmas, but right now it may never come, so let's have the hoist amendment debated, please.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't mean to offend you or any other male members of this Assembly, but maybe I did.

Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: I'm going to just briefly point out that this allows the minister of health to make regulations "for any others matters the Minister considers necessary for proper administration" of public health care. It also allows him to reject physician claims if the required information is not provided, and it provides for a \$1,000 fine for a first offence and \$2,000 for the second and each subsequent offence for doctors who direct-bill patients for an insured service.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know we have all had the contact letter from the MDs to the MLAs. They're very concerned about it. We've also had a concern that it could be a stepping-stone to the American HMOs, the health maintenance organizations. At a time when this province is talking about, "No, no, it's not a two-tiered system; it's not going to be a two-tiered system," maybe we shouldn't have legislation that indicates chipping away and leaning towards that two-tiered system. If we end up with HMOs, like the American style, which this could lead to, then that's an indicator to me that this is just one of the many steps in destroying the health care that we all love, that makes us Canadian.

So I am expressing concern about this. We are on a hoist amendment at third reading. I don't know the urgency of this bill. I don't know. If the minister could explain the urgency of pushing this through, then maybe I'd feel a level of comfort with it, and he has the opportunity at this time, at third reading, on the hoist amendment. If he could explain the urgency of putting this through right now, this week, this session, instead of holding it over and making it a good piece of legislation next spring, then I would say: okay; if you really need it right now and you think it's important and you're telling me that doctors have now bought into it, that you've consulted the very people this bill affects, then I can live with that. But, you know, I really have not heard that. To me this is, once again, an issue of power and control, and quite honestly I'm getting sick of it in some of these pieces of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed that we are still on Bill 7. I was hoping that the Government House Leader over there had talked to his caucus and said: "You know what, you guys? This one is worth holding over. We'll make it a little bit better." It may be a sign, too, that if we did legislation in a different way, maybe we wouldn't be sitting here on a hoist amendment. If we had all-party committees that looked at everything before it even hit here, maybe some of the changes and amendments could be done much more effectively. Maybe if all members, of all political stripes, sat on standing policy committees and heard some of these recommendations go through, then they'd be prepared for them in the Legislature. I wonder if this one went through any standing policy committee, if it went through just a brief meeting in the caucus that said it's going to do this, this, and this and everybody nodded their heads and said: okay, we believe you. But people forgot to find out if their doctor, the very doctor that serves them, was consulted on this.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned. I'm disappointed. I've expressed my concern a few times. I'm starting to feel like maybe nobody really cares that I'm objecting to it. I know that's not true of all the members of this House. I'm sure they all care very much, especially in this season. But you know what? I'm disappointed that they don't care about the very doctors that this will affect. They won't even consider letting this bill die on the Order Paper and bringing it back as a decent piece of legislation. You know, good legislation goes through quickly in this Assembly. It really does. The example: Calgary-Mountain View sponsored a bill that went through here just like that. Probably two speakers on each side and it went through. It was a good piece of legislation, so it went through.

Miscellaneous Statutes: well, I don't call that a real bill. That's

kind of a miscellaneous, housekeeping thing, though I was really grateful that the pickup truck amendment got put in there. I supported that one, and I didn't even speak to it. I did say, "I told you so," but only out there in the real world, because I didn't speak to Miscellaneous Statutes. Now I'm on the hoist of Bill 7. It was in the context of good legislation, Mr. Speaker.

So with those few concise words on Bill 7, with the hope that people will change their mind and pay attention to the hoist and hopefully let this die on the Order Paper – we can fix it up. The minister of health, I'm sure, has the ability and the capabilities in the department that can make it better. I'm sure he knows a doctor or two or three or four that he could speak to about it. I would hope that all members of the Assembly would support this hoist amendment.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to say a few words regarding the hoist amendment this afternoon to Bill 7, the Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act. This is necessary, and I would encourage all hon. members of this House to support this hoist amendment.

5:00

After what we've been through here in the last couple of weeks, since the Premier's televised address on November 17, the 10 minutes of supper-hour television, people have more concern about Bill 7 now than they even did in the past. The medical profession and all the clinics that are located within the boundaries of the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar will be very pleased with the hoist amendment that has been proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Now, we have to ask the question: why? I've had many phone calls regarding this bill from members of the medical profession, and they expressed their concerns. The first major concern they had was that this bill flies in the face of promises, discussions that were had and the promises that came from these discussions to limit government interference in how Albertans conduct their businesses and professional and personal lives.

Earlier this afternoon in debate on another issue, Mr. Speaker, an hon. member of this Assembly addressed just that very issue. We hear all the time about the government's goal of reducing bureaucratic red tape or the hon. associate minister or the shadow minister who is in charge of all this over the last few years and the key role that he and this idea played in the development of policy by this government. This is your chance to say that Bill 7 was a mistake and that you're going to take it back to the legislative drawing board as well.

One of the fundamental drawbacks of this bill is that I believe it attacks the doctor/patient relationship. Now, I'm not going to speak about the attack on the doctor/patient relationship that has occurred with Bill 40. But with Bill 7 the medical community is concerned. When this legislation does not solve any of the problems that it was intended to, whenever it was drafted, it has to be withdrawn. This side of the Legislative Assembly has conveniently given every hon. member in this House the opportunity to listen one more time to the medical profession and say no.

Now, I get horrified whenever people want to compare Alberta Health, because the people that are in Alberta Health work very, very hard and are committed to the well-being of sick Albertans. Also, they're committed to an efficient administration of our health

care system. I hope that it never, never becomes 50 percent of the provincial budget. I can't see that happening. Alberta Health officials and the administrators have the best interests of Albertans at heart. For them to be compared to an American health maintenance organization is astonishing, but whenever I look at this bill, I say: well, maybe there is a kernel of truth to this comparison.

Now, a health maintenance organization, as every hon. member knows, can dictate what sort of treatment a sick person is to receive. It's not necessarily the doctor that is going to determine what the treatment will be or how long the stay in the facility will be. In my case it's a hospital. In other hon. members' cases it may be the definition of a facility. If you're in or out of the hospital, regardless what length of stay and what treatment you are to receive, Mr. Speaker, that's determined by an administrator, not necessarily a member of the medical profession. Do we want that sort of operation, or do we even want to discuss the idea, the notion of this occurring in this province?

Bill 7, I'm afraid, is going to allow that. This is another reason why Bill 7 should be hoisted. Take the amendment that was provided. No one in this province is going to say anything like: "Oops, this government drafted some more legislation that is not current. It's not mainstream policy. It's not policy that Albertans want or agree with." No one is going to say anything like that. The medical community is just going to be very, very relieved.

The consultations that went on. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the Official Opposition's very able critic for health care and health-related issues, has discussed this with us in caucus. She has explained to all of us the views that the majority of Albertans have and the suspicions that they have on Bill 7. You have to do the right thing. If you want to calm the fears of Albertans – it doesn't matter, Mr. Speaker, whether they live in Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Coronation, Oyen, or Lloydminster. It doesn't matter. Everyone is concerned about the direction you're taking our health care system. They see Bill 7. They go to their doctor's office. They have every reason to be concerned, because this is another stepping-stone along the way to private, for-profit health care.

Now, the two-tiered system. I know; I know; I know. Everyone talks about the two-tiered system, but the best definition, Mr. Speaker, I heard for the two-tiered system is from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Whenever she said the two-tiered system – and this is what we're going to have if we allow this stepping-stone Bill 7 to happen. The two-tiered system will be this: you will cry twice, because tier in this instance is spelled t-e-a-r. You're going to cry whenever you have to wait a long time for treatment, and then you will also cry when you get the bill in the mail or when it comes on your credit card or debit card.

This is what is happening. The doctors are concerned about this. They go on at length with their concerns, and if we can't listen and if we can't trust the medical profession, just who exactly can we trust? That is the question, Mr. Speaker, and Bill 7 at this time is not necessary.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The problem, hon. member, with rhetorical questions is that invariably they're answered. I wonder if we could go back to the hoist and confine our remarks to when we have the opportunity to be recognized, when no one else is standing, and you can speak on the issue, which goes for all members.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, Bill 7 is not necessary, and it doesn't deserve the support of this House. This is why I am encouraging all hon. members to support this hoist amendment and say no to Bill 7, say no to Bill 40, say no to any of these policy initiatives that are coming forward by the Premier at supper-hour television. But the preferred approach that I would like to see with any health care consultations that are occurring in this province is co-operation and collaboration, and we're not seeing it with this bill. This bill is simply a reflection on the whole health care initiative that is proposed by this government.

With those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I will take my chair, and I will cede the floor to any other hon. member who wants to enter the debate. Thank you.

5:10

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry. [interjections] Hon. Minister of Innovation and Science, I wonder if we could take the opportunity to put your name on the list, and you can follow Edmonton-Glengarry. Right now it is Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon and talk to the hoist amendment to Bill 7, the Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act, 1999. This amendment certainly is a very, very worthwhile amendment. It is one that we should look very closely at, and it's one of those situations that I think we've had time now where cooler heads can look at this and certainly see the value that is there for us to step back, slow things down, and take another look at this bill. That's exactly what the hoist would allow us to do. You know, rather than trying to ram this home, it reminds me a bit of when I was on the railroad. They always used to say: never force it; get a bigger hammer. That's exactly what I feel here.

We have a government with a majority, and it's going to be their way, and certainly not the way that we would expect from government where we do have consultation, first of all, with the doctors. They are primarily the stakeholders most affected by this. They would have to be the primary stakeholders. To think that on a piece of legislation that we want to pass through this House that they were not consulted, this certainly doesn't reinforce to Albertans, to members of the opposition that this is a government that's open and transparent, as they continually keep trying to tell us. It certainly indicates that this bill, which we've heard so often is nothing more than a housekeeping bill, is required by the minister of health, that perhaps it isn't that. So if we are in such a hurry to put this through without consultation, without the support of so many people here in the province, then it certainly leads to suspicions of what this is.

I think what would happen here with the passage of this hoist amendment is it certainly would allow us to have adequate debate on the bill. Rather than it flying through second reading and Committee of the Whole the way it has, it would give us that opportunity to improve upon the legislation to make it the very best piece of legislation, which Albertans want, which Albertans deserve.

We should not be looking at closing in on this bill rapidly because the bill is flawed. It's seen as flawed by those stakeholders of the Alberta Medical Association, which want, again, to stop this, to look at it, to allow all views to be put forward before this bill is passed. Particularly, at such a sensitive time, Mr. Speaker, when we do have so many changes – they're not only occurring in health and the health care field – and at a time when the stakeholders of Alberta are being bombarded from many different angles. What we want to do is we want to make certain that we don't start down some path where

we cannot change directions so that there are alternatives to what is being proposed here in Bill 7. With time, with further debate, with new information that certainly the stakeholders that didn't have the opportunity for their input now would have – time is an ally that I think we all should look at. With time what is going to happen is that we will have this debate, we will have this information, and the decisions that come based on that are decisions that will fit the bill well for all Albertans. When we have all parties buying in and supporting this, then we'll have a much, much better piece of legislation.

I can see where doctors here are quite concerned when it does come to negotiations for fees for professional services. You know, they certainly didn't have the opportunity for input into this bill, and this would provide an opportunity for the government to reconsider. It would again give us an opportunity, all of us, not only on the government side of the House but on the opposition side of the House, to look at this bill, to look at the implications of this bill, and, of course, to propose the necessary amendments to the bill, which would not only gain the support of the medical profession but simply gain the support of all Albertans. If, indeed, there are some parts of this bill that in its present state are putting us down that slippery slope to private, for-profit health care, then now is the time, Mr. Speaker, to put on the brakes.

What Albertans certainly don't want, what the doctors don't want is that we have by people in control a manipulation of this publicly funded system that not only Albertans but all Canadians hold dear. When we look particularly at other countries that have traveled this path, whether it be Britain, the United States, New Zealand, where so many of these reforms have occurred that seem to have occurred in Alberta over the last few years, we don't want to commit the same mistakes and end up with the same messes that these people have. I know that the minister of health is certainly a minister who takes these concerns very seriously, and he is certainly a dedicated Albertan who would want us to solve problems and especially avoid problems that would be created out of a flawed bill.

Again, as some of my colleagues said earlier, is this really a case where we're looking at perhaps entering into a system where we have HMOs, which are so prevalent in the States? Do we want to go down this road where we're going to have in this country private insurance companies and where the decisions in health care will not be based on how sick one is but on how profitable a case could be? Of course, when we get to that system, we get to a system where profit becomes more important than quality. It moves us into a situation where, yes, we always will have a system for the poor, but any system for the poor is going to be a poor system, because all the profitability will be gone to the other system.

Albertans and Canadians, Mr. Speaker, have always looked at health care as an essential public service, and it is not to be determined by economics or profit margins but by need. Of course, in looking at that so that we have the very best for all, it must also be a fiscally responsible framework in which all of us work, all of us participate. It should never be driven by profitability.

5:20

I'm afraid that when I look at Bill 7 and see the holes in this particular bill, it certainly raises suspicions with me. It has already raised suspicions with the Alberta Medical Association. It is raising suspicions with Albertans. The last thing we need in this province is anything that is going to diminish the trust between doctors and government. Albertans do deserve tremendous legislation, the very best of legislation. We are in no hurry. We are under no gauntlet that says: this must be done by December whatever.

So as I just finish off my comments here, Mr. Speaker, I definitely

want to make the point that Albertans don't have all the answers when they look at this particular bill. If we do have this amendment, then certainly it will give us all that much-needed time to re-examine, to fill the void and the holes of this bill, which, for whatever reason, are popping up more and more. If it stops us at this point from moving down that road to private health, then certainly this amendment should pass. When we think that government is certainly nothing more than an extension of the people it represents, when we have this many stakeholders who are against parts of this bill, then it is incumbent on us as legislators to put on the brakes, to take another look, and that is exactly what this hoist amendment would allow us to do.

I thank you for this opportunity to speak here today on this amendment.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have a few comments to make, and I'm happy to speak in support of the hoist amendment.

I think one of the themes I see arising out of legislation that affects our health care overall is the lack of consultation that occurs with the legislation. We don't have lobbyist legislation in this province where lobbyists have to register and that kind of thing. Although it was a recommendation, it doesn't exist.

I often wonder at what point the government quits consulting with Albertans. Is it who has the deepest pockets, who's going to give the most support? Is it purely political? I kind of am under the impression that it's really when the government hears things they don't like, when it flies in the face of the ideology they have, they're not going to consult because they may not get the answer they like. I think this is just another example of that lack of consultation and the reason why this particular bill should be put over until another time when the minister can do the right thing, and that is speak to the doctors of this province, who have a long history of being active and knowing what's good for their particular industry.

It doesn't necessarily mean, Mr. Speaker, that it's who can yell the loudest wins, but there has to be a fair consultation and negotiation process. I'm sure that not every doctor is onside with every issue, but I'm sure there are times when the doctors speak out, and this is one of those times. They've spoken out on Bill 7. The AMA has said: we can't support this. Their concerns were that it flies in the face of promises to limit government interference in how Albertans conduct their business and professional and personal lives.

So what we see continually are intrusions. For a government that says that they're out of the business of being in business, that they're out of the business of legislating morality, that they're out of the business of interfering in Albertans' lives, we actually see the exact opposite, and that causes me some concern. I think the flip-flop that the government is doing here isn't sending a consistent message to Albertans.

The AMA talks about how this contravenes the government's goal to reducing bureaucratic red tape. Well, there's some validity to that, Mr. Speaker. The validity is that the doctors have a way of billing, and that way of billing suits their purposes, suits their needs. Because it doesn't suit the needs of the government, this very government that's changing the fundamental role of physicians in this province and in this country, changing the medical practices that occur in this province, changing the definition of hospitals in this province, and sliding in some pretty interesting definitions, I think the doctors are right to come forward with their concerns. I don't think it's in the best interests of Albertans. I don't think it's in the best interests of doctors and their patients. The doctor/patient relationship is paramount here. We see that being eroded consistently. Bill 40 is part of that.

This to me is part of the piecemeal process that government goes through to amend little pieces of legislation that are going to open the door to the bigger issue, and in this province, Mr. Speaker, that is private, for-profit health care, two-tiered. I don't care how they want to spin it. I don't care how they want to say it. That's exactly what's going to happen. The Premier talks about: not in his term will they have two-tiered health care. But his term could be over soon. We don't know that. And that could open the door to a Mr. Dinning sitting in the driver's seat as the leader of the Conservatives, and, whoa, wouldn't we just have fun there. We know what that objective is.

It's a matter of trust, Mr. Speaker, and quite frankly I don't trust this government. Albertans don't trust this government right now to make the right decisions for them. Therefore, I have a real problem with supporting this bill. [interjections] Quite frankly, trust is an important issue, and I think that I've lit a fire under the chairs of some of these fellows over on the other side. Cypress-Medicine Hat, Dr. Lorne Taylor – pardon me; I take that back.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Although it may have been a slip, it certainly is an understandable one. Would the hon. member in the dying moments of this afternoon please refrain from entering into debate before it's his turn?

MS OLSEN: I apologize to the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the doctor from Cypress-Medicine Hat. I just wanted to clarify that the doctor in front of his name is not medical. He's not a medical practitioner. However, I respect his knowledge and his ability in his field.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that I'm out of time, and I would have loved to have engaged further.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Under Standing Order 4(1), it being 5:30, the Assembly is adjourned until 8 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]